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SATAN FINDS

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BACK O' BEYOND
THE REPROOF OF CHANCE
A BLIND ALLEY
THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
BABA AND THE BLACK SHEEP
SINNERS ALL
MISTRESS OF HERSELF
THE INCONSTANCY OF KITTY
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MOCK MAJESTY
THE MARQUISE RING
THE FATEFUL ESCAPADE
OUR TRESPASSES

Satan Finds

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SATAN FINDS

CHAPTER I

AT A LOOSE END

It is one thing to leave for India with a host of friends and relatives to see you off at the docks with "God speed" and "farewell" called across the widening gap as the vessel moves out, and another to return after five years to an estranged England; for five years make a vast difference in these days to people and places. Familiar spots revisited after a long absence, have an aloof aspect; relations have died or migrated; friends have fallen away, and your place is so well filled, that you have the feeling of a visitor—a bird of passage—the uprooted sense; and find you are almost an alien in your own land. The girls you once flirted with, are married; some are walking behind perambulators. They are pleased to meet you again, but the old footing is lost. In fact, you have lost touch completely. Even the kiddies you had ragged in their leggy youth, wearing the shortest of short skirts on their naked limbs, are beginning to annex admirers and steep their souls in dancing and the great game of sex. You find you are speaking a different language to theirs and that it is an effort to claim their attention, while their eternal reference among themselves to this and that of which you are in ignorance—to people by their christian names of whom you know nothing—gets on your nerves till you wonder why you came home at all. Better to have

spent your furlough in America or Australia where there can be no disappointments and disillusionments for the Englishman and holiday maker.

In the home land, you realise that you are lonely, and you resent it; also, you resent the feeling of having dropped out of things; for the few months you have in which to shake off dull care and business routine, are not long enough if you would create new interests for yourself and enjoy the best out of life. Consequently, you wander aimlessly from one spot to another a lonely spectator of other people's domestic joys, and are bored, till you are ready to cut short your leave and return to work before you are wanted back in office—unless you have been lucky enough to meet with another lonely soul who, like yourself, is home on furlough, and able to share your wanderings and grousings.

Perhaps, when you are due to return to India and duty, you are introduced to the "one girl in the world," who shows that she might grow fond of you if only there were time to improve the acquaintance! But there is no time, and you leave England cursing your fate; or, you marry in haste to repent at leisure.

Life is full of perversities—which was how Gareth felt after his furlough had nearly expired and he met——

But of that, anon!

There were few fellows lonelier than Gareth Wynstay of the Indian Civil Service, when it came to counting up relatives still existing in the United Kingdom; and they were so scattered, that he gracefully declined to do more than spend a few days with each in rural places in the neighbourhood of Land's End and Aberdeen, Donegal and Kilkenny. Life is too short to waste in quiet spots, when on a holiday and you come from the jungles of Hindustan. So Gareth clung to London cultivating youthful cynicism as he watched humanity and the vagaries of society. He was quaintly old-fashioned in mind and ideals,

and had not ceased to wonder at the change five years had wrought in the minds and manners of his generation. Women amazed him, yet intrigued him; and had it not been for a natural sense of refinement and love of virtue and goodness in the sex, he might have dipped deeper into the well of temptation than was wise. But Gareth had acquired astonishing self-control for a man of his years which his contempt for vice assisted materially, so that certain phases of London life did not appeal to him and left him a dignified outsider.

He made a few acquaintances whose astounding ignorance of India made conversation difficult. Some feather-brained women were surprised that he should still be so fair; just as though they expected him to look like an Indian! Had he shot tigers? and had he suffered from the cholera morbus? Most girls looked upon him as a subject for pity since he was obliged to live in a vast jungle among only blacks!

"I couldn't imagine anyone voluntarily choosing to live in that ghastly country," said one. "Think of the unsettled state of the natives!"

"Yes, indeed," said another. "And what a broken home life! A cousin of mine writes that she spends six months out of the twelve in the hills because the climate is so impossible in the plains in hot weather; and next year she is bringing the babies home while he remains behind to make the income."

"Appalling! Marrying a man who works in India is like a picnic. It can't last happy."

"And what a waste of existence if one has to vegetate in the jungles!"

"No one who regards marriage in India as a picnic, and thinks life wasted if spent with him in the jungles, should dream of undertaking it," was Gareth's sincere advice. As a magistrate, he was obliged to put up with jungle places while climbing the ladder of efficiency to fame. At the top, there were soft jobs—even knighthoods—for those who have made their mark;

but it was true that any girl he married would have to endure periods of isolation and quiet that few brought up to a round of social engagements could endure, so he was determined not to be in a hurry about taking unto himself a wife. When he had sailed for home, he had had a lurking hope that he would meet with some sweet girl who would care for him sufficiently to share all that was his lot to bear. He had seen women face dangers and difficulties for the men they love, and India offered many noble examples of wifely devotion as well as matrimonial failures. He had nursed ideals and dreams, and while ideals live and dreams are beautiful, one never despairs.

However, before his holiday was over, he was very nearly in despair of finding his ideal girl. It seemed to him as an onlooker, that, since the war, girls wanted a great deal of entertainment. When it was not a theatre, it was a dance. Mostly, girls were crazy on dancing, and could talk of nothing else. A girl, for a companion, was an expensive indulgence—in fact, a luxury, he observed; for she expected presents, and drank champagne at dinner regardless of its cost and the fact that, often, the boy who was treating her, could ill-afford the money. She was thoughtless, giddy, and artificial, even to the colour of her hair and cheeks; and, conceiving it to be her mission to entertain her escort, she was so at the cost of her self-respect.

What was wrong with the girls of to-day? Gareth asked himself as he neared the end of his holiday without having experienced a single attraction or been able to lose himself in admiration of a woman. He wondered if the war had spoilt girls as it had ruined the lives of many men. Girls had had things very much their own way during the general upheaval, and children had grown up with unfortunate examples to follow.

Gareth had a long talk with "Mousie" Errol about it one day, but could not agree with her tolerant view

of people and life. She was too absurdly charitable—but what could you expect from the daughter of such a mother? Mrs. Errol had been one of the shining examples of wifehood that had kept Gareth's respect for women, alive, in spite of much that was disillusioning. And her reward was a selfish and unappreciative husband.

Mousie, aged twenty-eight and looking twenty, whose proper name was Elizabeth, was a girl that took some knowing to understand; but when you understood her, you wondered how men were so blind as to pass her by when looking for a partner in life. Yet Gareth committed that mistake because he was accustomed to using Mousie as a pal—someone in whom to confide and grouse to, just as though she were another "fellow" with an intelligent mind and a sympathetic heart. Had she been extraordinarily beautiful, he might have been won to admiration and love; but Mousie's nose was far from classical, and her baby face too indefinite to appeal to his artistic sense. He loved nothing better than sparring with her over a cup of afternoon tea and talking of old times when her father was a deputy magistrate in the same station, and Mousie, finished with schooling, had travelled out to her parents on the same boat that took Gareth to his first post in the East. That was years ago. Mousie's father had since retired on pension to a popular suburb of London, taking with him his wife and only child to minister to his comforts as in Bengal, and in his dislike of entertaining, had deprived the girl of all chance of meeting eligible bachelors and settling happily in life. She had failed in India to impress the men, so was hardly likely, he remarked bitterly to his wife, to do better at home where men were scarce and thoroughly spoiled.

She had failed in India, said her mother, because young married women absorbed the attentions of the young men that were marriageable. As for Gareth Wynstay . . . She could never make out Gareth

Wynstay who seemed fond of Mousie, but never wanted to propose. It was the same in India; theirs was a great friendship which had resulted in a fitful correspondence when Mousie came home to Ealing, and was just as warm and sincere during his holiday when the Errols' house was accustomed to his sudden appearances and as sudden departures. He would drop in, refuse all invitations to dine, treat Mousie to a theatre or two in the week, then vanish completely till his need of a confidante brought him again to the Errol's front door.

Mousie said, when questioned tactlessly by her ingenuous mother, that it was perfectly natural for Gareth and herself to be as brother and sister, since neither had anyone in such close relationship, and welcomed the comfort of the free and easy companionship with no sentiment to spoil the frankness of their intercourse.

Poor Mousie worked early and late to save her parents the expense of a maid, and, consequently, had little leisure to spare for sentiment, or the outward expression of it. Gareth who adored beautiful hands, was furious to think how house-work was spoiling Mousie's, when she would not have had to sacrifice them had her father spent less on his own pleasures and considered the comforts of his family, more. But he doled out what he thought was ample for house expenses and the needs of the two stay-at-homes, while he attended race meetings and visited his club whenever in the mood; and Mrs. Errol and her daughter loved him too much to criticise his conduct or disapprove. "Poor dear," said his wife, setting the example of tolerance, "if it were not for these amusements he would break up as many do after retiring from India, just for want of an active life and an interest in something as a hobby." That he spent a great deal more on himself than was just, was never mentioned, since who had the greatest right to the lion share of the pension than he who had earned it

by the sweat of his brow? was Mrs. Errol's philosophy.

"I shall never marry," said Gareth to Elizabeth one day when they had discussed his chances while home on leave. "Girls are intensely artificial now-a-days, and I can't see anyone I have met, so far, caring to sacrifice her *thé dansants*, her Wimbledons and her Henleys for the back o' beyond with any man who is daft about her."

"She would, if she really loved him," said Mousie.

"They don't love like that in these giddy times. I'll give it up and remain a bachelor to the end."

"You think so now! Wait till the 'one and only' comes along, and then you'll say something very different."

"No, I won't. There will never be a 'one and only,' for they are all cut on the same pattern. 'Mass production,' I call it. They are all cheap—like Ford cars. See the way they lip-stick and powder in public, just as though it were something to be proud of that nature was being assisted by art."

"I suppose when we are hot and sticky, powder is a great relief."

"Don't say 'we,' Mousie! *You* never do it."

"Don't I?" cried Mousie surveying her shiny nose in the mirror opposite. "I would do it now, only I haven't powder handy. I hate a polished skin as much as anyone, and always snatch a moment to smear my nose if it looks like a beacon."

"You, at least, don't do it in public."

"I admire those who are honest enough to do it in public and in the presence of their admirers. It is only a question of nerve. I haven't the strength of mind, nor the admirers, so powder in secret."

"You always look neat and nice, and, with your skin, are independent of powder. Girls in towns get pale and pasty because they are out too late dancing and flirting and living on their energy."

"Oh, my dear Gareth! I take no credit for my rosy cheeks and early hours. If I hadn't so much to do, I, too, might be jazzing and playing the very devil. 'But for the grace of God'—don't forget that!"

"You couldn't do it!"

"Couldn't I? Couldn't every mortal girl, given the temptation?—but, wait, there is someone at the back door and mother is out shopping. I'll be back in a moment."

It was always like that at the Errols' house. Mousie was either slogging in the kitchen or answering door-bells, while her mother was making the house spotless above stairs, mending the linen, or buying stores. Gareth always departed from the Errols' house with the feeling of being left in mid-air; there was generally an unfinished argument owing to domestic interruptions, or an unsatisfactory conversation conducted in snatches, while Elizabeth rushed about her household duties which could not be neglected for any caller. It was extremely annoying, for he knew that Mousie could be very stimulating if it were possible to pin her down for a talk—as to-day, for instance. He was just beginning to draw sparks when the butcher, baker, or candle-stick maker must needs ring the back door bell! Confounded system of middle-class dwellings! Gareth thanked God inwardly that his Service gave a bumper pension at the end of his time, so that his wife and daughter—(daughters?)—would have no drudgery, and plenty of leisure for social life.

To return to Gareth Wynstay's boredom.

His holiday, on the whole, was disappointing. So much so, that he determined never to take another holiday again, unless in company with a kindred spirit, that they might knock about together.

Two weeks before he was booked to sail, he was passing through a wondrously lovely portion of Inverness when his car broke down and obliged him to

break journey at a wayside hotel. He was exceedingly annoyed at the delay, but knew immediately that Fate had a hand in the business when he saw, in the restaurant not far from where he was dining, the loveliest and most delightfully feminine creature he had ever in his life beheld. Gareth forgot his manners in his admiration, and stared with unpardonable rudeness unable to take his eyes from her vivacious beauty. She was dining at a table with two others, a man and his wife, whom Gareth learned afterwards were passing hotel acquaintances, and the allure of her was something he had never before known. The sparkle in her violet eyes, the dimples in her velvet cheeks, her little impudent way, were all greatly intriguing, so that Gareth was determined to know her if he spent the rest of his holiday chasing her about.

By and by, he discovered from the hotel register that she was "Mrs. Smith," and the manager said she was a widow—in fact, she had admitted it when booking her suite. Well off, he was sure, for she did not seem to mind what she spent. She had come there a week ago to renew her acquaintance with a spot she had been familiar with in childhood, and did not seem in a hurry to leave.

How was Gareth to effect an introduction, was the important consideration. That he would have to know her, and soon, was becoming imperative. Dunmore, with its exquisite scenery and almost primeval silence, offered ample opportunities for cultivating an acquaintance, for the walks were picturesque and lonely, a lake at the bottom of the hill held possibilities of excursions and picnics, *à deux*.

And why not?—even if he had to return to India in a fortnight, there was no reason why he should not make the most of the time left and carry away with him delightful memories? He had even heard of couples marrying after a week's acquaintance, when time pressed! Gareth coloured hotly at the thoug and thrilled from head to foot at his own ma

He was in love. Fallen headlong into it at first sight, like any callow youth because the lady was a siren, and her charm hypnotic.

For a very short while he fought the growing infatuation, smoking on the terrace alone and bringing all his common sense and logic to bear on the subject while trying to realise that to stay on at that hotel was utter folly, but was completely under a spell the moment he returned into the lighted foyer and saw the lady smoking a cigarette, alone.

How exquisitely she was dressed! how perfect were the lines of her figure in the clinging gown! With all his detestation of modern girls and their freedom, his distrust of their characters, he reluctantly admitted that this one would compel adoration wherever she went. Though he knew nothing about her, he was willing to believe that she was virtuous and good; for anyone with such an angelic face and soft, confiding looks, could be nothing but an angel of God. That her vivid beauty was lightly assisted by art, made no difference to the fact that she was a lady to her finger tips. Ladies were now making free with the rouge pot and lip-salves; and those only were condemned who outraged nature by the clumsiness of their art. Gareth took up a newspaper from behind which he could feast his soul with stolen glances and wonder how he could possibly get to know her. It was terrible to know that day after day might pass before he had the luck to make her acquaintance. He could not imagine himself going up to her and introducing himself. What excuse had he for such a procedure? He could not say that he had been "bowled clean out" by her beauty and charm, and could not exist another hour without the privilege of her acquaintance! Some men were brazen enough to do more, but he had never forced himself on the society of strange passers or been guilty of other impertinences. A snubness would have been desperately humiliating.

However, to his amazement, far from wishing to snub him, the lady's eyes, softly encouraging, met his across the carpeted space between them, and she signed to him to approach.

Gareth thrilled as he rose and obeyed, instantly.

CHAPTER II

ENCHANTMENT

"I DO think it is stupid, don't you?" the lady asked with downcast eyes as Gareth reached her side. "Here we are, you and I, two perfectly harmless people, debarred from associating with each other in this dull place because there is no one to introduce us!"

"I have been cursing my luck from the moment I saw you," murmured Gareth, whom women thought "slow." It only shows that men are quite daring and capable of initiative when the spirit moves them.

"I refuse to be governed by conventions," said she, delightfully, her voice sweetly flattering, and further captivating him by the shy droop of her lids and her air of coquetry. "I felt from the moment I saw you that I—I would have to know you. Does that sound '*dreffully*' bold?"

"It is the most charming thing I have heard for years and it is very sweet of you to be frank. Of course, I have been racking my brains for an excuse to talk to you, but was so afraid you would think me intrusive." He loved her mimic lisp and small affectations.

"I have wonderful intuitions," said she, engagingly, pulling at the tassel of a cushion. "I knew, the moment I saw you, that I could trust you. You are not like other men. You have such a protecting way, so it makes me glad to think that you and I may be friends."

"Thank you," said Gareth, with a wildly beating heart. "I want you to look on me as a friend. My name is——"

"Oh, don't!—don't spoil it all!" she cried, interrupting him with a swift movement of her soft palm on his lips, done with the impulsiveness of a child. "I think it half the fun that we should not know anything about each other, but just be two people meeting out of a clear sky, so to speak, and accepting each other on our face value, as they say, to enjoy an ideal holiday! I love adventure! Let this be in the nature of an adventure, will you? I could discover your name in the hotel register, but I shall not look—and you? I suppose you have already looked?—and they say women are more curious than men!" she laughed naïvely. "But that doesn't matter, it is not my name. I *couldn't* be a 'Smith'—could you?"

"It is a good, honest name—but I will say it is far too unromantic and practical for *you*, who are the spirit of romance and adventure. But what shall we call each other?"

She regarded him contemplatively for a moment, her head on one side, her lips pursed, her eyes sparkling. "I'll call you *Jack* and you can call me *Jill*."

"No—that's not half good enough for such a romantic setting. You can call me *Gareth* and I shall call you *Lynette*."

The girl clapped her hands. "I love that! 'Gareth' suits you—it is so English and fair, while 'Lynette' is *sweet!*"

"It suits you. So I am not to ask questions?" he went on regarding her wistfully. "I should love nothing better than to tell you all about myself. Who I am, where I come from, my position in life——"

"Why should you?" she interrupted. "It is not as if anything depended on the information. Nor can it concern you to know why I am here so long as I have come and mean to have a happy time—with *you*. When the time comes to part, we'll remember only

'Gareth' and 'Lynette' and Dūnmore hidden in the mountains, the lake and the lovely scenery. We will look back on our holiday as a ray of sunlight brightening the world for a space. Perhaps, if we are great friends, we will each carry away a little memento of this divine spot, till we grow old and cease to remember how we passed the time."

Gareth looked steadily into her dancing eyes, his own suddenly grave as with foreboding. "You don't believe that," said he, quietly. "You cannot believe for an instant that you can flash in and out of a man's life and think that things will ever be the same for him again? Other men must have made you aware of your power? I am telling you nothing new when I say that to-night marks a new era for me!—and why? because you are like no girl I have ever known—am I transgressing?—because you are not only very lovely, but magnetic. It seems ridiculous for me to attempt an explanation of how you affect me. It is just as though you had woven a spell and had me fast—for ever." He was daring a great deal to say so much, but, somehow, he was not master of himself and impelled forward by a wild impulse to dare more than he had ever dared in his life. He wanted to impress her—the beautiful witch whom no man could look upon and not wish to possess. Was she as childish and young as she looked? and what was the meaning of her queer idea to remain unknown, and ignorant concerning himself? He wondered if she would really continue the mad adventure, or betray feminine curiosity after they had learned to know each other better? He knew no other girl who would have acted in this way. She was, indeed, unconventional and self-confident for one so young. Looking at her, he imagined she could hardly be more than twenty, if so much! Her dark-rimmed, violet eyes looked the eyes of a trustful child; her oval face had the complexion of a flapper—yet there was the wedding-ring, her widowhood, and unchaperoned state, to prove that she was

in many ways a woman of the world. Gareth wanted, terribly, to know all about her so as to understand the situation. She piqued him greatly.

"Listen"—she held up a pink-tipped finger warningly and forthwith he fell to admiring her beautifully manicured hand, so different from Mousie's that house work had coarsened of late. "You are running too fast ahead. I shall begin to think that you are like most other men if you flatter me so on first acquaintance."

"Any man placed as I, would do the same, for I have so little time at my disposal. If I am to get on at all, I must do it with cyclonic rapidity, for I have only two weeks left in England—which makes me feel absolutely sick. Why didn't I meet you before?"

Lynette did not reply for his news had taken her by surprise. For some moments, she was at a loss and looked crestfallen. Then——

"You are going abroad? I should have known you were from India by the sunburn. It makes your eyes so very blue by contrast. Must you go back in two weeks?"

"Yes. Can you imagine how I feel about it, now that I have met you? Why did we not meet before?"

"I suspect your guardian angel was very busy trying to thwart a mischievous fate. But—how cruel!—Do you know, I shall be lost when you have gone? Oh, I know it!—for—I have wanted all my life to meet a man like you. See how frank I am!"

"I too have the feeling that I have been searching for you since I grew to manhood." His voice was low and desperately in earnest. Never had he said such things to a girl, before. Now he could not stop the words that sprang to his lips.

"That means," she gasped, emotionally, "that we are, in a way, affinities. I shall not prevent you again, Gareth, from running too fast ahead—we have so little time in which to be—happy."

Gareth could scarcely believe his ears and felt light-headed. What did she mean? Was it a hint that she would let him make love to her from now, onward? He tried to understand her and then himself, but was swept off his feet by the allure of her beauty and the urge within himself for a closer intimacy. He wanted to take her two hands—to caress them—to dare to sip the honey of her lips; to hold her in a passionate embrace; but this was the brilliantly lighted lounge of an hotel . . .

He felt desperate. "I think you are the sweetest of girls," he exclaimed ardently. "What shall we do to-morrow?"

"What do you suggest?" was her demure reply.

"Let us spend the day somewhere, together. I am going to be very selfish, for I want to monopolise you entirely. We can get a car,—mine is temporarily out of commission,—and just run about where the fancy takes us. Does that appeal to you?"

"I shall love it!" Her eyes lifted to his full of seduction. "I shall tell you just a little thing, and that is, I have longed for years to be really happy. I have never known actual joy or the things that contribute towards it. Now I am reckless and shall live—at last!—and, with your help, forget all the miserable past. I am glad to know you, Gareth."

Enchantress! Gareth's eyes melted to hers. He could scarcely credit his good fortune. Whatever happened, he was determined that this girl and no other should be his wife. Had he only seen her for a few hours? He laughed in reckless contempt of time and convention. Unknown to himself, he had been living for just such a moment as this, when two souls should awaken simultaneously and learn that their happiness lay in each other's arms. It was a miracle! He was not vain, but the soft yearning in her eyes told him that at last she had discovered her mate. His senses swam in contemplation of all that was before him. She did not know, but would soon hear,

thought he, that he never meant to give her up as long as they both should live. She should belong to him in the eyes of all men, as his wife.

With the thought came tender respect to control his passion, so that he should not frighten her by his ardour. He had lightning intuitions of transcendent happiness—crushing regrets—glimpses of heaven and hell crowding the near future. Whatever was in store, he had met his fate, and would take "Lynette" whoever she was—whatever her past history. She had hinted at the need to forget all that had gone. It would be his mission, henceforth, to teach her forgetfulness. How soon, he wondered, would she let him take her to a registry office that they might be made one?

That night, after parting from her at her door, he slipped out of the house to dream of her in the moonlight. The soft gloom of the silvered landscape intensified the amazing romance till he almost imagined that he was living in a fairy tale with Lynette for his princess. The spirits of Elysium had brought them together and neither needed the formal routine of "growing acquainted" in order to love. He was madly in love, already, and he was sure that he had seen the glow of passion in her sweet, shy eyes, that only wanted an opportunity for expression.

Yet she was not shy. He was glad of that, for it had made things easier for them both. She was starved for love—he had read it in her face, and thought it wonderful that she should have kept herself in reserve for him and true love, refusing to deal with the counterfeit.

Gareth had no proof that she was a pure woman, but would have staked his soul that she was as pure as she was refined and beautiful.

It was a mere "pick-up"—this acquaintance!—something within him gibed. What of it? he replied angrily. What had he to do with cold prejudices? Circumstances altered cases. It was no vulgar "pick-

up acquaintance," for Lynette could never be vulgar.

She was intensely romantic!—all the better for the completeness of their joy when he could hold her in his arms, for he could never accuse her of being coldly calculating. Position, means, had nothing to do with her yielding: As husband and wife, they were the spirit of Love, mating by natural selection! The thought gripped him, and he was on fire for her, wondering if she would not permit him to go on the morrow to make the necessary arrangements for their marriage. She was a widow and he a bachelor! What was to hinder their immediate union?

The cool mountain air gradually calmed the fever in his veins and sent him to his bed rather ashamed of his violence and precipitation. It was not possible, he told himself, that she would be as eager as he. He must give her time—the lovely thing—even a little time!

Yet, time was precious! With a pang he was constantly reminded that he had only two weeks in which to fix up his whole future happiness. God! how perverse fate was to bring this amazing thing to pass on the very eve of his departure!

Though he loved her for her wish to be unpractical and romantic he would have to deal with actual facts when he proposed marriage. She must know all about him, and tell him whatever was necessary for him to know concerning herself so that all should be honest and legal when they were made man and wife. He played with the idea while falling asleep, smiling with anticipation of the morrow which would bring them together again. Already, he grudged every moment spent apart. Just before losing consciousness, he found himself thinking of Mousie. What would she say if she knew how insanely he was acting?—mad for love of an enchantress with violet eyes and seductive lips? He, who had been so much a man of the world, contemptuous of modern women and their free and easy ways, was suddenly the slave

of one who was ultra modern in ideas though exquisitely refined in manners. Mousie would say that he was bewitched, hypnotised. Perhaps he was?—he did not care, for Lynette's eyes were full of a bewildering promise, her lips were made for kisses. Mousie would, herself, acknowledge that no human man could do otherwise than forsake all and cleave only to her! Such obsessions can never be explained, they simply happen, and men like Gareth Wynstay who have held aloof from affairs of the heart, are the first to succumb to a big passion when they find, as they think, their ideal woman.

What did they talk about all the next day when they motored through that dream country, beautiful with the glory of summer, the mountains bathed in a golden sunlight?—Gareth could never recall a single conversation with Lynette that did not pave the way to the fierce love that was consuming him.

Lynette was everything he believed her. To him, she was the most desirable being in the world. He wanted to know more about her—the longing amounted to agony, but he never questioned her, not even, late in the afternoon, when they reclined on a bed of moss in a hollow above a brook, sheltered from the road above by a sympathetic willow, and he asked her to be his wife.

Up till then, Lynette had been all softness and encouragement, but the word wife brought mutiny into her eyes and her sweet mouth tightened.

"You have spoilt everything!" she exclaimed petulantly when he begged to understand. "It is like bringing us down from heaven to earth with a jar. Do you think in order to love as we are beginning to love each other, we must go through the formality of a marriage ceremony?"

It was her first admission of mutual feeling. Till then she had coquetted with his hints and wooings.

"Marriage makes no difference whatever to one's feelings," said Gareth. "I am madly in love with

you and you know it. Marriage only makes me sure that you are mine till death."

Lynette laughed sceptically. "Gareth!—you are a darling!—but you are obsolete, hopelessly old-fashioned and ridiculous!—perhaps that is why I have fallen in love with you?—It makes you so different from other men who tire me by their crudeness. Has marriage ever held a man and woman together, if they are agreed to part? What about the divorce court? You read how the files in that division are choked with petitions—and why? Because people are made to tie themselves together *for life!* There is nothing in this world that we care to stick to, for life! and the surest way to tire of a bond is to make it legal. I have been married before, Gareth, and a burned child dreads the fire. I have sworn that I shall never do it again—*never!*"

"Lynette!"—there was pain in Gareth's cry. "What does it mean? I want you so?" He tried to read her face, but she had averted it to hide the flush in her cheeks the glow in her violet eyes.

"Don't spoil our beautiful romance by talking of legal rites, Gareth!"

"Darling!—I honour you so!"

"Would you only respect me if a lawyer or a priest mumbled words to us and made us sign a register?"

"You know that I worship you!—that I respect you more than any woman living."

"Though you know nothing about me?—just blind worship?"

"Why, of course! I could not imagine anything else. I am at your feet—dearest! How else can I ask for the gift of yourself, but through marriage?"

Again she smiled, this time, into his burning eyes. "I have no use for marriage, Gareth. Are you startled and repulsed?"

Gareth raised her hand to his lips passionately, dumb before her astonishing philosophy.

"If you still want me—I am yours." She turned to him and buried her face in his breast.

For awhile, Gareth could only press her to him and rain kisses on her lips, face, throat. He felt at sea, having lost his bearings, and was aware only of the urge within him for possession. She was wonderful! Wrong-headed—but wonderful! Had he any right to take advantage of her condescension—her generosity?

She loved him. He believed it, for the lips that met his own, thrilled him with their abandonment to passion. There, in his arms, lay the gift of herself—a quivering feminine form, soft and yielding; the fragrance of her intoxicating to his senses.

Why worry about the future?—the question of marriage could be reckoned with later. He was human—his heart throbbed heavily. Desire claimed fulfilment, and there was no bar!

"Lynette!" he cried, inarticulately, "I love you—I love you so!"

"It is—Life!" she answered tremulously.

He stooped his lips to the whiteness of her bosom; his arms crushed her to him till she was breathless. It was a miracle that so much loveliness was his—he could scarcely believe it—yet—he was not repulsed! As if to prove his right of possession, his hand slipped over the graceful curves of her lovely form and lingered as he felt it thrill beneath his touch. It seemed that he was a king just entering into his kingdom. Words died in his throat, and he could only murmur—"My beautiful!—my beautiful!"

* * * * *

They walked through the glades on their way to the abandoned car while the slanting rays of the setting sun cast long shadows at their feet. They might have been on a desert island for all Gareth saw of humanity. Up the hillside, smoke issued from some concealed cottage where a peasant family were, doubtless, domiciled, otherwise, there was no sign of life visible.

"I shall always love this bit of Scotland," said Lynette rubbing her cheek against his shoulder like a kitten well content. "I lived near here as a little child and know every stick and stone for miles around. My maternal grandfather was the laird, but when he died everything passed to a distant branch of the family. We became 'dreffully' poor!—so—so I married."

(Even then, Gareth did not ask "What was your name?" and "Who did you marry?" He was sure she would tell him in her own good time.)

"I was not happy in my marriage," she went on, "for I knew that the day would come when I would love as men and women love, and I resented the fate that had forced me into bondage. The moment I was free, I made a pilgrimage to the old place just to feel a child again—and—I met *you!*"

"You are a child still, you baby!" cried Gareth stooping to kiss her for the thousandth time. "A wonderful babe with Life in your gift! Will you ever realise what you have done to me?"

"Not more than you have done for *me!* See, I am treading on air—or it feels like it! How much happier we are to have this as a beautiful secret all our own! What is it to the world that we belong to each other? Can't you see with me, that it is an impertinence for the world and the law to interfere between two lovers? It strips us of our romance and brings everything down to bald fact. In this way, neither of us is obliged to think of the future. We stay together or, if disillusioned, we part. If we elect to stay, we prove that we are gloriously happy. How degrading to live side by side if we have ceased to want each other! In marriage, that obligation kills love."

"But, beloved, I have always hated intrigue and deceit. We live in the world and of it, acknowledged by society and smiled upon, yet you and I must always treat our glorious happiness as something to hide from society, or society will have none of us. We

will have no place among our class if it becomes known that—that——"

"I know!" laughed Lynette, "which makes it all the more thrilling. Everything is sweeter that is contraband! You value it more, you never cease enjoying the efforts you make to obtain it. To my mind, matrimony is stale and flat. A parody of the happiness that is yours and mine to-day, Gareth!"

"You little radical!" smiled Gareth with an ache at his heart. He was so proud of her, he wanted to publish it from the housetops and in all the newspapers in the kingdom that Lynette was his *wife*—yet she refused to be married! To be her lover without the sacred bond to sanction their union, was like skating on thin ice. One day it would crack and plunge them into the cold depths of the stream. There was no security in the life, and he would be unsettled and jealous whenever other men flocked about his precious girl flattering her by their admiration. "The main thing is—are you happy?" he questioned her anxiously.

"Haven't I unblushingly admitted it?" she cried, dancing along beside him.

"We have a problem facing us," said he as they came in sight of the car. "You and I have to get away for awhile together somewhere so as to be cut off from people. I want you to myself. This is the beginning of our honeymoon—I ask nothing more wonderful in life. Married or not, you belong to me, Lynette, isn't that so?"

"You know I do!"

To Gareth, it seemed that he had suddenly been translated to Paradise. Men did not need to think of a future heaven when there were girls like Lynette in the world. Yet, underneath all his enthusiasm and adoration was a thread of regret that she did not hold with the marriage bond. Free love was too new a doctrine for his naturally conventional mind to accept unreservedly. He was afraid of it, and the insecurity

of the tie. He was frightened to think that he had no claim on her—no hold, but their mutual passion. What was to become of him if she wearied of his devotion? He could not contemplate ever wearying of a life with *her*.

"Sweetheart!—we cannot live at the hotel," said he, when they were on the way back. "I want you all the time. I cannot exist if apart from you. The long nights—I think of them and myself, sleepless, wanting you in my arms, and I cannot carry on. We must go away together somewhere till the boat sails."

"Gareth!—it sails in a fortnight!" she cried, appalled, as though suddenly reminded of the fact.

"Yes. What does it matter, if you are coming with me?" He watched her anxiously, his heart in his eyes. It would be death if she did not mean to go with him, East.

Lynette pressed her lips to his shoulder, making no reply, and Gareth took the action for consent, thrilling to his soul at the caress, like harpstrings under the touch of loving fingers.

"How long have we known each other, Gareth?" she cooed.

"A lifetime, beloved! I am taking you away from here the moment the car is ready, and we'll find some quiet spot where we can be alone together—all in all to each other. Will you love that?"

"I want it too, with all my heart!"

CHAPTER III

ELYSIUM

One does not know how such things happen, but they occasionally do. Wise fellow as Gareth was, he was completely enslaved by the girl though she still preserved her incognita and scorned social and moral laws. What he would have been ready to condemn in any other woman, in Lynette was above reproach. Whenever capable of independent thought, he could only wonder how such a girl was allowed to be alone. To him it was an unceasing miracle that he should have found her before some other fellow had the chance to steal her love. It was therefore the hand of Fate; it was Destiny! That she would not reveal her history or circumstances, he considered a whim, and accepted in the light of an adventure. She was young, beautiful, and romantic, and the romance of their mutual passion appealed to her. She being a disciple of Free Love, Gareth was thankful that it was to him she had turned, and not to some other man of fickle mind and gross mentality. If he could only hold her love, he had no doubt that she would someday consent to marry him, when he would be the happiest fellow alive.

For a few days, he existed only when Lynette found time to wander with him in the mountains. For her sake he placed a great restraint on himself in the hotel and spent unspeakable nights longing for morning. He loved her so, that he would not take advantage of her indifference to the gossip of strangers, and

visit her in her rooms. If there had been a hint of scandal concerning her, it would have cut him to the quick, so he bore patiently while laying plans for the immediate future, and when his car was ready for use, he transferred himself to another hotel to await her arrival.

Lynette followed, glowing with pleasure in the intrigue, and together they drove to a primitive little village among heather-clad hills where Gareth had found a picturesque inn and engaged a delightful bijou suite for a week.

"That will give us just a few days in town to get all we want for the voyage," he confided to her, secretly glad that she raised no objection. How wonderful she was! He was never tired of looking at her, touching her, making love to her! She was a veritable witch, the way she beguiled him into forgetting that he as yet knew nothing at all of her, while she was in possession of all facts concerning him. Nothing seemed to matter when she was so loving and kind. She was the spirit of laughter and allurement. He never knew a dull moment in her company.

Lynette had apparently travelled much, for he constantly made discoveries concerning her accomplishments. She was well educated and spoke more than one language. What she did not know of the continent, was not worth knowing. She had quite an extensive knowledge of Paris, which took the light out of Gareth's eyes, for he was jealous of Paris. Having himself the tourist's acquaintance with that gay and immoral city, he could not help wondering with whom she had sojourned there. He hated it when she said: "I adore Paris!"

"Is it in that Gomorrah that you learned to believe in Free Love?" he asked gloomily. At which she laughed merrily, showing her pretty teeth and dimples in full play at the corners of her mouth.

"Why don't you ask the name of my lover?" she teased.

"Don't!" he cried sharply. "If you have ever had a 'lover,' I believe I should kill him."

Lynette appreciated the speech so much that she perched on the arm of his chair and embraced his neck. "I never knew you were so blood thirsty! But, no, Grumpy! Apart from my husband, now dead, I have had only one lover whom I have taken for my own, and he is Gareth Wynstay. I love him tremendously and am proving it—isn't that so?"

Gareth's reply was silently fervent, while he instantly forgot to press the point of her visit to Paris. Nevertheless, she volunteered the first piece of information she had yet given him of her past——

"I lost my Mother when quite a kid, and Daddy used to take me with him wherever he went. Dad was a radical in all his opinions, so you don't wonder that I am the same, do you?"

"Where is your Dad now?"

After a marked silence, Lynette admitted that he was in Italy. "After I married we saw very little of each other and went different ways."

"But, surely, now that you are a widow, he is sufficiently interested in you to have you with him?"

"Aren't you glad he isn't?" She smiled down at him. "If I had gone to Italy instead of visiting these haunts of my early childhood, you and I would never have met!"

That was true. Gareth could only thank his lucky stars that she had been left to follow her own devices.

In all his life, Gareth had never known such happiness as during that week in the Highlands with Lynette. It made him more than ever determined to break down her obstinacy and force her to consent to a marriage by a registrar. He snatched the time between their outings to write and secure a two-berth cabin in place of the single berth which had been reserved for him, determined that married or unmarried, Lynette was to continue as his wife. People were easily duped. Who ever troubled to doubt the

honourable relations of a couple passing themselves off as man and wife? No one on the boat or on his arrival in India would dream of questioning the position. After all, nothing mattered so long as they were not found out, and who would dare even to imagine that a man in his position who had always borne a high moral record, would insult his friends and society by introducing to them a mistress and not a wife!

When Gareth allowed himself to think over the situation, he was dismayed. It was terrible, the lengths to which he was prepared to go for his infatuation! Good friends who trusted him, were to be deceived and cheated. Great God!

If the truth leaked out, he would be responsible for the ruin of a girl's good name, and she the girl he loved to distraction. Lynette must not be allowed to persevere in her whim. She must descend to earth and recognise the danger more to herself than to him, and marry him before leaving the country. It would not take more than a day or two to fix up the formalities, and he would set about the business at once. There would be no peace for him if they were not married, for he knew that he would suffer hell with jealousy and suspicion if Lynette were not bound to him by a legal tie. Men would pay court to her on the voyage and in India, and he would be living on a mine that might at any time explode and shatter his very existence.

As the days slipped by, he grew nervous with apprehensions, for Lynette continued indifferent to the irregularity of the union. She put him in mind of a beautiful butterfly that had alighted on a flower where the honey was sweetest, and she was well content to stay so long as her senses were drugged by the nectar of happiness. What was to prevent her spreading her wings, presently, and seeking a fresh experiment? —the world's garden was full of enchanting flowers.

His very being was shaken with the dread of such a possibility.

In any case, he knew that the idyllic honeymoon in that paradise among blue mountains and rippling streams, could not last beyond a few days, for time pressed and the next scene would be London with its multifarious distractions; and then the voyage and an end to their wonderful isolation—the marvellous oneness of their union!

"Look!" said he to her one evening as they strolled together through a wood, arms entwined, the picture of ideal lovers. He pointed to the undulating mountains, heather-clad slopes, and purple distances wrapped in changing mists. "We might be alone in the world. I am drinking in my fill of nature's wonders with you beside me, feeling all the while that nothing lasts. All this is passing, the beauty, the stillness, the precious isolation from a world of interruption and trouble. If you and I could only live for each other alone in the heart of God's country, it would be heaven, indeed. But we are on a jealous earth that snatches from us everything we prize most. In a couple of days, you and I will be plunged in the midst of confusion and racket. It will next be London and the four walls of a hotel, crowded streets and no time for love like this!"

"But you will love me still?" she said, smiling into his eyes.

"I will love you always," he cried stooping his lips to hers. "But we shall be fighting all the time for leisure to find our heaven which others will try to take from us."

"You are pessimistic, Gareth, old thing! I can't think like that. I live in the present and take what it gives with both hands. Time enough to grouse when things are all wrong."

"What I am driving at," said he, "is the necessity to make our union secure. You and I can only hold fast to our great happiness by safeguarding its

foundations. When we are in London, we will have to marry. I can only see peace of mind through marriage."

Lynette's face was quickly averted while the hand he held quivered perceptibly. "I wish you would not harp on that!" she said nervously.

Gareth sighed. "I won't, here, but very soon we will have to take it seriously. "Darling——" he coloured awkwardly, "as long as you and I are not wholly one—that is, legally, in the sight of all men,—there is no stability in our life together. Besides, you are not frank with me." He hated to utter the reproach, but it hurt like sin itself to think that she still wrapped her identity in a shroud and left him in blank ignorance of all concerning herself and her past. It was not fair, he reluctantly admitted to himself, for he had told her all there was to know of his own life. He had volunteered information from time to time, hoping that his example would lead her to make her confession naturally; but she was always mute on the subject of herself save to tell him that she had never loved anyone so much as she loved him. As the days advanced with rapid strides, she showed moments of genuine distress. Her nerves were on edge with some hidden dread and he sometimes surprised traces of tears, shed in the darkness and silence of the night.

Lynette slipped from his embrace and descended to the brink of a murmuring burn to sit on a rock and dip her little hands in the cool, crystal stream. It was a diversion, and Gareth was becoming used to her determination never to consider his proposals of marriage, and to the barrier of reticence she always maintained.

"You are not frank with me," he repeated dropping down beside her.

"I told you in the beginning that it was my idea of romance. Love takes no cognisance of facts and circumstances. One loves best if one asks no questions and just accepts the wonder of it blindly."

"That is true. It has been true for us. I am ready to accept you blindly, dearest. But we have got to marry, and that's the end of it. In order to do so, I will have to know your real name and a few other trifling facts that the law demands before we can sign the register. You are coming East with me . . ."

"Am I?" she asked under her breath.

"Aren't you?" He was almost stern as he flung the question at her in tones of reproach.

Lynette made a gesture of despair. For a moment she seemed to be struggling with composure, then the smiles triumphed. She was very lovely when smiles lighted her glorious eyes and curved her soft lips.

"Gareth—have I made you very happy?" she asked, leaning her cheek against his.

"My darling!—I did not dream that a mortal soul could know heaven on earth. You have given me heaven—can I say more?" His voice was choked with emotion. Gathering her in his arms, he held her close, kissing her with the utmost tenderness. "You have given me life," he went on brokenly. "I could never live without you, Lynette. It would be like death if we were parted, that is why I want you irrevocably mine—my beloved wife. It is the highest honour I can do you. Why deprive me of this great blessing?"

"I am afraid I must be very wicked," she said dreamily. "I do not regard marriage as a blessed estate. Too often it is a hateful bondage. I have been so happy with you, that I have a feeling that I shall yet have to pay for my unsanctioned flight into the regions of romance. It sounds almost poetical, but our experience has been a living poem, Gareth! Don't let us speak of such things as law in this dream-world of ours. Leave that to the last. How long can we stay here?"

"We must leave the day after to-morrow if we mean to marry and then embark at the docks."

"But—we could catch the boat at Marseilles? That would give us more time?"

Gareth was so enchanted by the plural pronoun from her lips, that he was willing to make any concession. "Yes. We can do that and gain a few days, but only a few!" There was so much to be done in town—but he had agents who could act for him!

"Then give me a few more days here, Gareth! I feel like clinging as long as I can to the spot which has given me the greatest happiness I have ever known. I suppose people would say I am bad——? Some day, you will look back on this idle holiday and say it was all because she is altogether immoral. She could never have gone so far if she had modesty and self-respect—the two indispensable attributes of womanhood——!"

"Lynette!" Gareth covered her hands with kisses protestingly. "You will always be to me the spirit of Love—the most perfect example of all that is desirable in woman!"

Lynette looked radiant. "You must always remember me like that—the 'Spirit of Love!' How can I explain my attitude towards love? To me it is as much an essence of the soul as it is a physical delight. It is also a mirror reflecting all about it, therefore we must have beautiful surroundings if love is to reach the greatest heights of beauty in expression. Breathe on the glass a hint of criticism or ill-natured doubt, and it is dimmed. You have made me so happy, Gareth, that I reflect the joy within me. To talk of capturing this wonderful essence and nailing it to a register, is sacrilege. I want to love you like this always and not have to share you with your friends whose claims will often interfere with mine. I grudge you to your Service, and will not be able to live through the long days that pin you to a desk in court!"

"Yet, men have to work in order to live and support dear ones!" he murmured, full of ecstasy.

"If only you had enough on which we could live for the rest of our lives in these mountains!"

"It wouldn't answer," said the practical Gareth. "In order to be happy, we have to be employed. Idleness is a curse. You will observe that most of the wickedness in this world is committed by the idlers. They get into mischief, sure as fate, and, with mischief, is trouble and unhappiness."

"Perhaps it is because you and I were so idle that we fell in love and broke the law? I am always idle and falling into mischief!" she sighed.

"What other mischief have you done?"

Before she could reply, there was a sound of footsteps approaching along the water's edge and Lynette separated herself from Gareth's embrace just as a face in a tweed cap peered over a group of rocks on the bank. With the face protruded the point of a fishing rod.

For a moment, the man looking into Lynette's eyes was motionless, the next instant, he raised his cap and came round the rock to where she and Gareth were seated, his hand outstretched.

"Thelma!—why,—to think of meeting you here! Have you dropped from the clouds?"

"Wylber!" Lynette gasped, turning rose pink as she allowed him to take her hand. All of a sudden, she was confused and at a loss what to say. It seemed to Gareth, that she was frightened, for her lovely eyes were like those of a startled gazelle. "Wha-what are you doing up North?" she stammered.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRAIL

GARETH felt irritated and annoyed while listening to the stranger's voice explaining to Lynette what had brought him to those parts. He had addressed her as *Thelma*—so that was her real name?

"I am staying with dear old Lady Warren out there," said he, pointing in the direction of battlements and towers peeping through woodland scenery across the valley on the other side of the burn. "She's entertaining a house party and will be delighted to know you are here. I have spoken to her about you, and I know she will be glad if——" his eyes strayed sullenly to Gareth's face which reminded Lynette to introduce the men.

"My friend Mr. Wynstay who is kindly motoring me to visit my people in the next county," she said, with glib untruthfulness which was excusable under the circumstances. "We had something wrong with the carburettor, so while they were putting it right in the village, we have been admiring the view. Fortunately, we don't live in the days of our grandmothers and don't take chaperons around with us on these trips. Don't you think we enjoy a glorious freedom, Wylber?"

"I shouldn't complain if you gave me the chance to enjoy such a tour!" There was a look of malice in his eyes.

Gareth was amazed at her resourcefulness. He could never have carried off the situation so skilfully.

Already she had recovered her natural ease, though her fingers still trembled as they toyed with her parasol. To him, she accounted for the newcomer in whimsical fashion.

"Wylber Staunton is Lady Warren's favourite cousin. When you get to know him well, you will not be surprised, and agree with me that he is right in nursing great expectations. She is quite an old lady, with a great deal of property that she must leave to distant relatives, so I hope you will be very rich, some day, Wylber!" She smiled divinely into his eyes.

"What have you done with——"

"I heard you have had promotion," she interrupted. "A Captaincy—is that true?"

"Alas! promotion is not so rapid in the army in the piping times of peace!"

"Mr. Staunton was still in training when the war ended," she explained to Gareth, "that is why he is whole and his fatal beauty unimpaired while the rest of our manhood is maimed and its looks devastated by shot and shell."

"How fortunate for him," said Gareth, not too pleasantly.

"Isn't it? *and* for the girls! Have you had any more affairs of the heart, Wylber?" she asked impudently.

"Not since we parted," was his prompt reply. "It wasn't fair the way you left us all in the lurch, you know. Think of the 'devastated' condition of our programmes. I chucked everything and went abroad when you vanished. What happened?"

"Nothing at all," she replied, airily. "I was merely fed up with things. Too many dances, too little money, and too——"

"Many flirtations?" he asked, meaningly, a look of resentment in his eyes.

"They bore you if you are not in the mood," she retorted.

"I am sorry," he said, looking offended.

It was awkward for Gareth to listen to their veiled talk and to feel that he was not wanted by the man whose eyes betrayed what a lot he could say if there wasn't a third to hear him.

"So you cut your engagements ruthlessly without a word of warning! I fear, as a dancing partner, I was not exactly a success."

"You are too modest, Wylber. You dance divinely! The fault lay with me. I wanted a quiet time in the north to save money, and London was too hot and crowded and racketing. The mountains called me—Fate called me," here she gave Gareth a demure glance which had the effect of a draught of champagne, "so I answered. I wouldn't be back in London now for a fortune, though my visit to my dear ones has been delayed by a few hours." (How smoothly she lied! Gareth was speechless with astonishment though he excused her, even admired her facility because of the need there was to camouflage the situation thoroughly.) "Have you ever known such scenery? Gareth and I have been lost in wonderment at our luck. He is of an artistic temperament, and I am a born poetess, unrevealed to the world. Together we make pictures in words and talk in the language of Shelley."

"When are you moving on?" asked Staunton, his eyes dwelling on Gareth enviously.

"As soon as ever the car is ready," said Gareth.

"That will be this evening," said Lynette. "I heard that it will be quite ready for the road by five."

"Then we'll start at five," said Gareth, no longer anxious to linger at the inn now that young Wylber Staunton had found them out. While Lynette conversed happily with her late dancing partner whom evidently she had deserted in the height of the season, Gareth wondered how long it would be before the young fellow would discover at the inn the truth concerning their stay! "Mr. and Mrs. Wynstay" in

the visitors' book, and a suite of rooms which they shared! No more incriminating evidence was required to damage "Thelma's" reputation for ever. Gareth felt hot and cold with anxiety for her, and distress that he should have been instrumental in bringing such a calamity upon her. She was not to blame, his generous, loving girl, the soul of romance and with a mind at war with conventions. He should have protected her better.

Lynette, however, showed little concern. Her wit and chaff, the soft looks she gave the handsome boy who had come to an anchor before her, gave Gareth the impression that nothing troubled her long. Her nervousness had vanished while she proceeded to enslave the boy she had evidently captivated in London.

When politeness obliged Wylber Staunton to proceed on his way consoled by her promise to write soon and acquaint him of her plans, Lynette comforted Gareth by entering more fully into explanations concerning her acquaintance with the boy in Town.

"It was bad luck meeting him, darling," she said, as they walked back to the inn. "How Fate must laugh at us sometimes with her tongue in her cheek. Fancy Wylber, of all men! Of course he is in love with me. I cannot help that, can I? But my running away from him proves how good I have been, doesn't it? I could so easily have stayed and let him make love to me. You will know now that Thelma—yes, that is my real name—is true to her creed. Free Love when it is *Love*, mutual and irresistible. I don't love Wylber Staunton though he is a splendid fellow and the girls are all crazy about him. He is not my style. I can't endure very fair men. His hair is like flax, his eyes are too pale!—fancy a man with washed-out blue eyes and tow-coloured hair! I love vivid colouring in a man—like—my Gareth's!" she squeezed the hand which was guiding her over rough places. "Take care!—don't kiss me here—he might be watching from a distance—you never know what

boys are capable of! A month ago I was having a royal time, what with Wembley and the river. Wylber was introduced to me by mutual friends and he took me on the river whenever the weather was fine. We danced almost every evening—in parties," she added for Gareth's consolation, "and saw a great deal of each other. When I saw that he was crazy about me, I made up my mind to clear out. It was kindness to him in the long run, for I did not want to hurt him, the dear! he is such a kid! I must say, very young boys tire me. There is nothing in them! I suppose we will have to get away at once?" she asked Gareth. "How silent you are!"

"I have enough to make me dumb," said he. "Don't you think it is time you told me something about yourself now?"

"If you insist—I must!"

"I insist on nothing. It is up to you, Lynette."

"You can call me Thelma."

"I prefer Lynette."

"Darling!" she coaxed, slipping her hand within his arm. "One day, I shall tell you all! Will that satisfy you? Let us get away from here at once, for it will never do for Wylber to learn that we are still here and come down on the inn full of curiosity. I told him we were leaving so as to prevent his thinking of calling on me. We can break journey at some other quiet place when I shall tell you everything you wish to know, or simply run away like a coward."

"Don't do that!" he cried in consternation. "Not unless you wish to be the death of me."

It did not take long to pack and strap their luggage on the car and leave that lovely valley in the Highlands for Edinburgh and then London. Gareth broke journey for the night in a village on the way, where Lynette confessed to him that she was no widow, but a wife with a husband "abroad." There had never been any sympathy between them, he had no understanding of her nature, but admired her as a doll and

treated her as a slave. She had so hated her life that she had forced him to let her spend a year apart from him, and that year was all but over! She now felt that no obligation in the world would induce her to return to him for whom she had nothing but physical repulsion in her heart. Did Gareth think she was an abandoned creature?

She made her confidences lying in his arms with only a glimmer of moonlight to intensify the shadows in the darkness of their room at the inn. He could not see her face, but breathed the perfume of her daintiness nestling warmly to his side. Her soft arms wound about his neck, her sweet voice whispering her story, wove spells to cloud his judgment and bind him for ever to her.

"That puts an end to our getting married!" said he, kissing the "abandoned creature" with even greater abandonment than ever. His disappointment was crushing, but nothing could weaken his love or kill his longing for her.

"Do you blame me for never being able to say 'yes' when you talked of marriage?"

"I understand all now," he said, miserably. "We'll just have to pretend we are married. Take the risk, eh?—write and tell him that you are never going back to him and leave an address in London for any communications he might wish to make. One thing is certain. I shall never give you up."

As she made no reply, he took silence for consent and waited for further confidences which never came. She seemed to have said enough and appeared to consider that there was nothing else that mattered. Gareth was still ignorant of such important facts as her husband's profession, the country in which he lived and worked, his name. She was *Thelma*, though he persisted in calling her *Lynette*, but her married name was still to be confessed. What was he to do? Annoy her with questions? No. He decided to leave it alone. She would very soon tell him more

since he knew so much. He would henceforth introduce her to his friends as Mrs. Wynstay and take it for granted that no one would wish for particulars of his marriage. He would let it be understood that the ceremony was a civil one, and who would trouble to know exactly where it had taken place? People were far too much taken up with their own concerns to worry about their neighbours'. Should the truth ever be discovered, there would be a divorce and then he and Lynette could be married. Till then, he would try to keep her name untarnished in the eyes of society and his friends.

They talked till late; eventually, Lynette slipped from his arms and fell asleep. He too slept deeply and dreamlessly. Since the worst was known, he felt that he could face it like a Spartan and make his programme accordingly. So long as Lynette loved him, he had nothing to fear, and his love for her was so strong and deep that he would take care that no one came between them. It would be his business to see that her feeling for him increased with the years, so that without the legal tie, they would have no desire to part.

The sun was streaming into the room when he again opened his eyes, to spring up amazed that he should have slept so soundly when his mind was so disturbed. It was nothing but reaction, he told himself. He had been so strung up and in mid-air, as it were, that Lynette's confession, instead of upsetting him thoroughly, had given him something to hold on to. He knew where he was, and would know how to act. Sleep had come with natural healing for his racked nerves.

Lynette had risen before him, he observed, for her place lay vacant by his side though the impression of her form still depressed the feather bed. He was sure she was in her bath and called aloud to her outside the closed door of the general bathroom, but as there was no reply, he turned the handle and went in to shave

and bath and prepare for their long drive to Edinburgh. She would probably be breakfasting in the dining-room with other travellers—at which he felt distinctly hurt. That she should care to have any meal without him to companion her was a new departure. It made him hurry all the quicker through his ablutions and dressing till he was ready and fit to descend to the dining-room and join her.

He discovered, however, that she was not there. At this, he was just a little puzzled. What—why—how——? *where* was she? Outside? The day was fine. Probably she was enjoying a breath of air on the steps or in the patch of garden at the back of the inn. He made a tour of the place in search of her, then returned, sorely puzzled and getting worried. Why was she absent when she knew they would be making an early start?

He went back to their room hastily, with a new idea growing in his heart. He distinctly remembered that all her toilet requisites had disappeared from the dressing-table, which he had accounted for as packed by her and ready to be carried out in her suitcase to the car. He had not thought of looking to see if her suitcase was still occupying its corner of the bedroom.

When he saw no sign of the suitcase in the room, he was thrilled with alarm. Was it possible that Lynette had left him?

The thought was inconceivable! He would not harbour it a moment. Lynette could not leave him when she knew what her going would mean to him! She loved him, if not so madly, at least, very dearly, and it would hurt her terribly to be forced from his side. Oh, no! It was not at all likely that Lynette could have gone away—besides, where could she go alone? he asked himself, as he passed a hand across his eyes.

Suddenly a slip of paper attached by a pin to the frill of his pillow attracted his attention. What was it doing there? He had not noticed it before, but had

no doubt it had been pinned there by Lynette herself, and his heart sank like lead. Taking it up, he saw that a few lines of farewell had been scribbled on a slip of paper. They read :—

"My beloved,

"I never knew when we met at Dunmore that a "little frolic commenced in idleness and a thirst for "adventure would have led so far, but life itself is a "comedy of degrees—a tragedy, I would call it, in "our case. I love you, but I cannot go with you "to India, and since we have arrived at the parting "of the ways, I choose to leave you now, like this, "broken-hearted and despairing. Go back to your "work and your splendid career and try to forget "this little interlude in our lives, as I shall endeavour "to do, that I may live. I thank you for your love "and goodness to me. I wish to God I could have "rewarded it better! Forgive me, and good-bye,

"LYNETTE."

Gareth stared at the note, read and re-read it so as not to miss the full force of its import.

It was just that—Lynette had gone. She had left him and did not want him to look for her. It was to be final. She loved him but could not go with him to India—why?

The answer was plain. Her husband was undoubtedly in India!

Suddenly passion broke bounds. Why hadn't she told him the whole truth last night and given him a chance? He would have applied for an extension of leave—he might have made up his mind to chuck his Service and find work elsewhere so as to keep her always by him. How did she expect him to continue now that she had left him? Life was valueless to him parted from her. She knew it would be so, yet had cruelly thrown him over and vanished. He refused to accept her verdict. He would go immediately in

search of her and make her listen to reason. If she could not go east, they would go west, to America. He had enough to live upon till he founded a business in that go-ahead country.

He was not going to dance to Lynette's piping. He would throw up his career at once. Find her he would, if it meant searching for her throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Gareth felt a madman in his wild rebellion against the fate imposed on him by the girl he loved. No girl had a right to lift a fellow to the heights of bliss and then dash him to earth and to unutterable despair.

The first thing to do, he told himself, was to find out how much of a start she had had, and in which direction she had gone. Could anyone tell him? He descended and made close inquiries. Ultimately he gleaned through someone on the staff that someone else returning to the inn from a fair in the small hours of the morning, had seen a solitary female figure climbing the road in the direction of the moor.

It was the direction from which they had come the previous evening, and Gareth could not understand what Lynette could possibly do on foot along a dreary stretch of moorland road. She might take shelter at a wayside cottage when tired and get a meal, but what was her ultimate destination?

Gareth climbed into his car with the light luggage he and Lynette had carried with them on their adventure in the Highlands. All her trunks and impedimenta had already been booked through to King's Cross nearly a week ago. If all things failed, he would sit outside the cloakroom at King's Cross till she or some messenger came to take delivery of her baggage, and he would so discover where to find her. At present, he tried hard to overtake her, for she could not have travelled very far on foot. He puzzled his brains to account for her taking that road which, if pursued, could only lead back to Craigmanan from which they had fled, and she could not get there in a

day. Possibly, she had hoped for a lift in a carrier's cart, or by some motorists going North? He sincerely trusted that she had been disappointed, for then he might have a chance of finding her, otherwise he would be done!

Gareth travelled a long way, much farther than Lynette could have walked, and inquired for her at every hut on the way without success. At a tea shop in a Highland village where he stopped for refreshment, as it seemed the favoured rest-house of tourists, he learned that a high-powered touring car—a Vauxhall—had pulled up for breakfast early that morning with two occupants, a young man—very blonde and handsome, and a beautiful young lady in a "cinnamon" suit and close hat with a floating veil.

Gareth became rigid at the description, for the man recalled Wylber Staunton, and the woman could be no other than Lynette, for she was travelling in a cinnamon-brown suit with a hat from which a veil floated. Yet it seemed impossible for the two to have met in that miraculous fashion. Could he have come after them in his travelling car and picked her up on the road, meeting her by a mere coincidence? Stranger things had happened!

Where had he taken her? To his cousin, Lady Warren, of Craigmanan Towers? He remembered the handsome old stone edifice peeping at the world through a veil of copper beeches and spreading oaks.

Gareth instantly drove to the Towers. Whatever came of it, he would show Lynette that he was not a man to be trifled with. He would not tamely submit to her programme, but see her and remonstrate. If he could see her alone, and tell her of all he thought of doing for her sake, he was sure she would consent to return to him.

With set jaw and a look of anguished resolve, he motored swiftly to the beautiful estate owned by generations of Warrens, and arrived under the porch as the sun was sinking behind the Craigmanan range.

It was a fool's errand, after all. Gareth learned on arrival, that no such lady as the one he was seeking was known at the Towers. Lady Warren was in the library with her guests and could be informed of the stranger's visit, if it was his wish to see her, Gareth was told by the portly, grizzled butler who looked as if he had grown old in the service of the family.

"I will not trouble her, if I have made a mistake and the lady I am looking for has not arrived," said Gareth. "Is Mr. Staunton here?"

"No, sir. He had a telegram last night and left before dawn."

"What car is he driving?"

"A Vauxhall, sir."

"Thank you," said Gareth in a voice that sounded to his own ears as a stranger's. "I shall not stay. There is no need." He drove away, heading unconsciously for Edinburgh, while his brain repeated monotonously—"A Vauxhall, sir."

So Lynette had managed to send a telegram to the boy at Craigmanan, calling him to fetch her. When he found her, how would she explain that act? What did it all mean?

He was still wondering at the meaning of it all, when he arrived at the Waverley Hotel, dizzy and faint from lack of food and mental anguish. Why he was in Edinburgh, he could not have explained, only he had no inspiration where to go or how to set about looking for Lynette that he might bring her to reason. His whole soul cried out for her as for his soul's mate. There was no one else in the wide world to fill her place in his heart and at his side. That she had behaved abominably, did not occur to him. He had found in her what no woman in all his life had had for him—fascination, charm, generosity, passion, and the light of his life was extinguished now that he was bereft.

CHAPTER V

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

JUST about this time, the Errols were passing through deep waters. Mousie had written to Gareth's club address to tell him that her father had been killed in a street accident in town; but as all Gareth's letters were accumulating in a receptacle till he should return to claim them, she had received no reply. Mr. Errol had been knocked down by a van and crushed while crossing a crowded thoroughfare, and his widow and daughter had buried him at Kensal Green and returned to face penury with dazed minds and fainting hearts. Still Gareth made no sign. The day of his departure came and went. They believed he had sailed, and wondered why he had neglected to say good-bye. It was not like Gareth Wynstay to treat such old friends with indifference. But trouble had made them inclined to be cynical and feel that the lower people descended in the social scale the less were they desired as friends. It was not like Gareth to be self-seeking and heartless, but there was a great difference now in their positions, and the best of men were capable of snobbishness. So deeply wounded was Mousie at the treatment she and her mother had received from Gareth, that she never wrote again. The semi-detached house at Ealing was given up for apartments in a cheap quarter of Hammersmith where mother and daughter tried their best to make ends meet. No money had been saved, and as a life policy had been mortgaged to pay Mr. Errol's racing

debts, there was nothing for his widow and child to fall back upon, but a meagre pension. As he had lived, so he had died, without a thought for those he was leaving behind him. His pension from the Government of Bengal had kept up the home while he had lived and when he died, it died with him. He had spent everything above the housekeeping allowance and the small personal allowances to wife and daughter, on his one hobby, horse racing. It was his only passion and it had devoured all he possessed. In the hope of getting rich some day, he consorted with bookies and trainers, and his bad luck only had the effect of driving him to greater optimism and endeavours to retrieve his ill-spared losses, till there was nothing left but the furniture in his home which was sold to cover the funeral expenses and the cost of moving to a humbler abode.

As it needed the combined pensions of Mrs. Errol and Mousie to keep the elder woman in the ordinary comforts of life, Mousie began to cast about her for work.

What could she do? was the question Agents asked her wherever she called to register her name. Mousie puzzled long and gravely over the answer. She had received no technical training whatsoever, and was unsuited for anything that meant earning a gentlewoman's competence. Schools would not want her, as she held no degrees. She could not offer herself as a city clerk as she had no knowledge of book-keeping; and as she could not type and had never learned shorthand, there was nothing left but domestic service! It was heartbreaking, for the class that undertook domestic service was not hers. To be sure there were "lady helps." But the wages for long hours were not enough to dress her respectably, much less allow her to assist her mother whose health had suddenly given way, confining her to her bed with something not unlike a stroke.

"Your mother," said the general practitioner who was called in to pronounce on her condition, "has no reserve strength whatever, and she is suffering from chronic diabetes. It is not necessarily fatal if she can be pulled through her present weakness and prostration. You will have to pay special attention to her diet and see that she is properly nourished."

Mousie felt as if her legs refused to support her. Such news was a bolt from the blue. All her life she had been accustomed to see her mother working for others. She had never failed so long as her father was alive, but with him gone, she seemed to have lost the incentive to continue. It was a sudden collapse and Mousie wept to see how rapidly she wasted and how little she was interested in her own recovery. Her father was to blame, she was full of resentment against the dead, for he had exacted too much from his unselfish wife, and, by his extravagance, had prevented her from spending enough on the care of her health.

"Oh, mother, this all comes of your neglecting yourself to see that Daddy never wanted for anything!" Mousie broke out impulsively.

"Hush! don't say that," said the nerveless woman. "We owed him everything. He was your father and the breadwinner."

"You were too self-sacrificing, Mother dear!"

"It was my happiness," was the reply.

Mousie kept her mother in bed and called all round the neighbourhood to ask for little pupils. She could teach tiny tots the three R's and give first lessons on the piano. In order to secure pupils, Mousie sold a bit of jewellery so that she could pay down a deposit and buy a piano on the easy-payment system—her own was sold when the house was broken up. After a few weeks she managed to secure a few pupils on a minimum charge and spent her days in slavery, her nights in nursing her gradually fading parent. Sometimes, her soul rose in rebellion at the sight of

a Rolls-Royce gliding past her in the street with carnations and ferns in the silver vase between the windows and a luxuriously-dressed woman reclining among the cushions looking bored with life. It made her understand why Bolshevism was on the increase in the country, for it was terrible for starving people to see riches vaunting themselves heartlessly in their midst. While some worked their fingers to the bone to buy just enough food to keep body and soul together, others could pay thousands for a conveyance and cover themselves with jewellery worth a king's ransom! It was all wrong—yet there was no remedy in sight!

Mousie wept bitterly to relieve her feelings, for she was becoming worn out and her nerves were frayed to shreds, after which she braced herself and ate less that she might buy her mother the necessary medicines. She swept, dusted, cooked, washed dishes, laundried, spent a couple of hours daily on her pupils, nursed her beloved patient through the day and often through the night, and was fast adding ten years to her age, so the mirror told her, every time she peered at the lines coming on brow and cheek. What a life! She sometimes questioned if it were worth living! Life was grossly unfair,—giving everything to some and nothing to others! Other girls of twenty-eight were having a glorious time dancing and merry-making with their boys, while she was forced to drudge in her diminutive flat without a single alleviation!

At this point, what saved Mousie's temperament was a visit she paid to a beautiful hunchback girl who lived with her old grandfather on the floor above. She was out of tea on an early-closing day, and ran upstairs to borrow a little. She had seen the youthful face of the hunchback frequently, and wondered at its placid sweetness and strength. It was common knowledge in the building which sheltered several families, that Phœbe Ray, the deformed girl,

was everything in the world to her aged grandfather who was rapidly growing blind. He had been an artist, and now lived on the slender capital he had saved from the sale of his studio and pictures. He could no longer paint, or teach drawing, and when his money was all gone, would drift with his grandchild into the workhouse—so they said. Phœbe, however, refused to be downhearted. God was in His heaven, so all was well with the world. She believed in hopefulness, and though she had little to make her hopeful, she refused to despair.

Mousie borrowed the tea and after that had many conversations with Phœbe who was a lonely child without a single gleam of brightness in her life but what shone from within. She was always so grateful for magazines and books, for, reading after her day's work was done was her only recreation. She lived in her books and forgot that she was not a beautiful heroine of romance like those she read about.

"Don't you ever feel sick of your life—the drudgery of it, I mean," said Mousie, one day, when she was more than usually depressed. "It makes me mad to see how unequal things are in the world. Why should some get all the knocks and others the comforts? Surely that was never intended by God?"

"I don't suppose people are as God intended," said Phœbe thoughtfully. "So the world has become what they have made it. We all have to suffer the consequence of mistakes made before we were born, and I believe, if we do our best faithfully, we'll make it right for many who come after us."

"Very poor comfort for us, in our lifetime!"

"I suppose so. But it never helps to pity ourselves too much. When we do, we cease helping. I believe in shouldering our own burdens and making the best of things as they are, not lying down and groaning. Groaning never gets us anywhere. If

we keep smiling we begin to see the humour in the dullest side of life. There is humour, always, everywhere, if we look for it, you know."

"I think you are wonderful to be content!" cried Mousie filled with genuine admiration for the little hunchback who had a beautiful philosophy and a beautiful face, but a cramped and misshapen body. It was sad to think that she could never enjoy a romance of her own, but must fly to books and imagination for glimpses of the wonderful in life. She had ill-furnished rooms which she strove to make homelike with tender touches and scrupulous cleanliness, and could smile when she knew that others had all that her artistic soul was deprived of through dire poverty. Did she never long for a lover?—dream, as Mousie often did, of a man's arms round her and passionate kisses on her lips? But who would wish to embrace all that crookedness? though Phœbe's lips were sweeter than many! Yet, her friends never heard a word of complaint from the girl, but, instead, were given a fresh impetus towards a patient hopefulness every time they left her cheerful presence.

"I am content because I am a philosopher," she smiled. "No use crying for the moon, the lesser stars also give light; besides, it's all the same when we are dead. The millionaire won't take his 'Rolls' to heaven, and the beggar might find he has a better chariot!"

The Errols' front door was on the first floor facing the dusty stairs which were commonly used by all the tenants of Jellico Court, as the mansions were named. It opened to a narrow passage that did duty for a hall, which communicated with the two rooms, one of which was the kitchen-living-room, and the rent of these, cost the Errols thirty shillings per week of their strained income. Mousie did her best to make the rooms refined and cheerful out of the material to hand, which was the furniture and personal treasures she had been able to rescue from the sale of their

effects at Ealing, but it did not require a critical eye to detect the signs of increasing poverty in advancing delapidations of furniture and appointments; and though Mousie should have become used to the sight of faded curtains and threadbare carpets, it broke her heart to think that when her mother died, things could only go from bad to worse, for she would be poorer still. Mrs. Errol's pension would die with her.

One day, about two months after the death of her father, while she was preparing her mother's evening meal, she was obliged to cast aside her apron to answer a knock on the door. Someone had knocked repeatedly and the sound was getting on Mousie's nerves. She wished people would not disturb her at that particular hour when her one pair of hands had enough to occupy them without having to let in some importunate neighbour who wished, possibly, to borrow something. It often resulted in the milk boiling over or the gruel sticking to the bottom of the pan; so she was not very welcoming as she drew back the door.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, scarcely believing the evidence of her eyes as she saw that it was Gareth Wynstay who was standing on the threshold. "I thought you were in India!—do come in. But what have you been doing to yourself?" She regarded him with consternation for he had lost a great deal of weight and was looking years older than when she had seen him last.

"I took three month's extension," said Gareth advancing into the kitchen in her wake and laying his hat and stick on the table.

"Not there!" she cried hastily. "I won't guarantee the surface is free from grease. Put them by the window." Gareth complied and sat down, at her request, on a chair close at hand. "I do feel sorry to see you looking so poorly. Have you been ill?"

"It is nothing, really," he replied. "I might almost ask the same of you. What have you done with your roses, Mousie? You are so pale and thin."

"Trouble," she replied briefly. "How did you find us?"

Gareth explained that the post office at Ealing had directed him when he found their house untenanted and in the hands of builders and decorators. He had also heard there, of Mr. Errol's death, and wanted to say how sorry he was to hear of the sad bereavement. While speaking, his eyes took in the altered conditions which told their own tale.

"You did not see it in the paper?"

"I have been too ill for some time," he explained, "and never saw a paper till lately.

"I am so sorry! I thought something had gone wrong. Mother will be so sorry too. You must come and see her in her room. She has quite taken to her bed since Daddy died. Tell me about your illness."

Gareth first expressed his regrets at hearing of Mrs. Errol's breakdown, then said that he had been in a nursing home with something like brain fever. "I seemed suddenly to go to pieces," he said, averting his eyes. "It was very weak of me, but I couldn't help it."

"I suppose the reason was—a girl?"

Mousie always hit the nail on the head. Gareth nodded for as yet he found it difficult to allude to Lynette, if not impossible while a compassionate pair of eyes were on his face, deploring the haggard lines and drawn cheeks.

"I have had a bit of a disappointment," he allowed, "but that is over. I see you are at your old game, caring for others. There never was anyone like you in the world, Mousie!"

"It's a case of 'needs must when the devil drives,'" she said bitterly. "Things were never as

bad as they are now. Life is a terrible grind for some; and no reward till one is dead."

"I am aching to return to the grind," said Gareth. "Idleness has not done me any good. One begins to wonder if holidays are not an invention of the devil!"

"It depends on what use you make of your leisure! Certainly, idle people with money to spend, simply ask for mischief, and Satan is ready to provide it, according to the old saying. Why not unburden your mind to me? I am the old Mousie quite ready to sympathise and advise."

"I see you are, in spite of troubles and tragedies."

"I am terribly glad to see you again, Gareth!" she sighed. "It is like a bit of old times to have you in the kitchen while I am stirring a pot. I am too depressed about mother and need companionship and comfort. When do you leave for India?"

"In about three weeks. Why not get a nurse to take care of Mrs. Errol?"

"It would be as easy as hiring a chariot and riding to the moon," Mousie retorted, and was instantly contrite. "Dear old Gareth! You will have to make allowances for my bad temper. I seem to be losing all my past, admirable self-control."

"I know you cannot afford it—but—if you would only let me help. What is the use of friends if they cannot come up to the scratch when required?"

"That is very dear of you. I would accept anything for mother's good if not for my own."

"For you, I should prescribe diversion. You are fading away, Mousie. A theatre or two, a few joy-rides and dinner somewhere would make a lot of difference to you."

"I haven't the heart at present, and no glad rags. Presently I shall have to join the Salvation Army for the sake of the clothes. They provide the uniform, I believe."

Gareth laughed for the first time in weeks and seemed astonished at the sound. Trust Mousie to create laughter when spirits were at the lowest ebb! He had not seen the "Mousie" of the day before, nor did he know that the sight of his face had acted like magic on her depression. "I don't think I have heard myself laugh for ages, so it has done me a world of good to see you," said he. "The fact is that—I fell in love—frightfully in love if you can understand—all my eggs in one basket, and when the smash came, I had nothing left. So I went dotty for a bit—nearly did for myself till they put me in a nursing home where it was discovered that I had something akin to brain fever or sleeping sickness. I think I must have slept for a solid month, but I felt like a worm when I got up and tried to walk again."

"Poor Gareth! I always knew when you took the malady—(I allude to Love)—that you would take it badly. So the girl jilted you?"

"I suppose you would call it that. She cried off and left me in mid air. I—I suppose she funked it in the end," he continued, feeling all the better for opening his mind, even partially, to a sympathetic listener.

"I think it was hateful of her!"

"No—you wouldn't, if you knew all. But I cannot go into it. There was a lot that made her act that way. I believe she felt it was the only thing to do—if we were not to be married."

"I have no patience with girls who don't know their own minds. They have no right to entrap a man's affections if they have any doubt concerning their intentions."

"Sometimes, you are swept off your feet, and it is only in cooler moments that you begin to realise things. Anyhow, I shall not speak of her again. I want the subject buried for ever."

"Have you not seen her since?"

"No. And I hardly think I shall, again, once I

have left the country. It is best so," yet he sighed regretfully.

"I think you are wise to try to forget her," said Mousie, averting her gaze from his twitching features. It was easy to see that Gareth had suffered terribly. She felt it her duty to comfort the poor dear and keep him from brooding. In imagination, she saw a heartless coquette leading on the honest, sincere fellow to love her, and then throwing him over for someone more to her taste. Oh, why did the best men always waste their affections on worthless natures? She had feared this would happen to her Gareth whom she had worshipped for years,—and so it had!

As the broth was ready for her mother, Mousie excused herself to Gareth and carried it from the room. He had consented to share her own simple meal of bread and cheese and a cup of coffee, and had done so with the best taste possible not to let her feel the embarrassment of poverty. He liked nothing so much as cheddar, and was "off big dinners," which made Mousie still more his worshipper. Was there anyone in the world like Gareth!

She had scarcely been gone a minute, when she returned scared and trembling. Her mother seemed so queer—she could not be roused, and yet, she was not asleep! She seemed unconscious, muttering to herself and gazing dimly into space. "It is like a sort of delirium. Oh, Gareth! is she dying?"

"I'll fetch the doctor. Where is he?" Gareth was intensely sympathetic. In another moment, he had rushed from the house and Mousie returned to her mother's bedside. It was terrible if her mother was never going to get well!—her poor, unselfish mother who had spent all her energies on caring for others! If she went, Mousie felt that she would be utterly alone. They had no near relatives and very few friends. Oh, why did God let such things happen? Life was too hard! She thought gratefully of Gareth, and thanked God for the best of

friends in her need. To have him standing by, was to lean against a tower of strength. Perhaps, his coming at this crisis, was God's way of compensating her for past trials and tribulations, and all that was yet to come?

Her mother's condition was unchanged when the doctor arrived, and Mousie waited breathlessly for his verdict. When he drew her apart, she could tell by his face that he had bad news for her.

"I am so sorry to tell you that we can do practically nothing for your mother," he said sympathetically. "In diabetes, coma is generally an indication of the end. As your mother's heart is very weak, I am afraid it would be unkind to buoy you with hopes."

"Then—she is dying, doctor?" cried Mousie, choked with emotion.

"That is what I believe," said he.

Mousie accompanied him to the door, exercising the greatest self-restraint, for she had heard, long ago, that doctors were thankful to be spared the sight of tears and distress. When the door closed on him, she sank into a chair in the kitchen and sobbed brokenly, feeling that Gareth would understand and sympathise.

He let her cry, believing that it was right to give way, when overwrought. It cleared the mind and soothed the nerves. How often he had wished in the weeks gone by—or was it months?—It now felt like years ago—that he could have cried like a little child to relieve the fierce pain at his heart. Now he was past tears and outward signs of emotion.

"You are the bravest little soul in the world, Mousie," said he, when her sobs ceased and she wiped her eyes. "You have splendid pluck and will bear up, I know, like a heroine. I want you to know that I am always at the back of you, ready to be called upon for help, if your burden is too heavy for your shoulders. Cheer up! There are things infinitely

worse to endure than the death of a dear one. It's very finality is healing, though it sounds impossible to believe. Take comfort in the thought that you have been the best of daughters to the best of mothers. You have nothing to reproach yourself with."

It was inexpressibly soothing to listen to him. Mousie loved his voice, his honest eyes, his whole personality. In her secret heart, she had adored him from the first and was filled with wonder that any girl could have been so blind to the stirling worth of his character, as to have jilted him!

CHAPTER VI

A FORCED DECISION

MRS. ERROL died peacefully after a few days of unconsciousness, and was buried alongside of her husband. Mousie shed no more tears, for it seemed to her that she had gone beyond weeping into a vale of despair. Life all around her was unchanged, only, there was no place for her anywhere. Something of her thoughts she managed to convey to Gareth when they sat and talked over her future prospects which were, indeed, blank.

"I've got to work to maintain myself," she said, her chin in her hand and gazing dully into the gas fire Gareth had lighted. It was a raw wet day in September and the chill had crept into their bones. The cheerlessness of the kitchen which did duty for a sitting-room, was not calculated to inspire either of the two with hope. Gareth, however, was determined to see that his dear little Mousie was properly on her feet and likely to do well before he sailed. It gave him the heartache to see her in such terrible straits, and he very tactfully suggested that she should let him make her an allowance, at least, for the present. "You are the kindest fellow alive," she replied, "but you can see how I couldn't, with any self-respect, take money from you."

"I don't," said he gently. "Why, Mousie, we have always been like brother and sister. If I had a sister, would I not have to provide for her were she in need of support?"

"But I am not really your sister. I am no blood relation," she replied, almost pettishly, because

reminded of the numberless times she had hated that brotherly attitude of his when she was a woman with a heart bursting with love for him.

"Can't you see, dear," said Gareth, "that it will upset me frightfully to leave England while you are on your beam ends? You can't become a servant——"

"Why not? If there is nothing else, I'll apply for a job as a cook-general."

"It isn't to be thought of!" indignantly.

"Then I'll go into a shop. It won't take me long to learn exactly how to say—'*and* the next?' They like lady-like shop-assistants at the big shops in town, and I hope appearances won't be against me. You can lend me the money for my outfit which I shall return from my weekly wage."

"Don't, Mousie! I hate to hear you talk like that. You were never cynical and hard, and with your looks, it doesn't go down."

"What are my looks?"

"Those of a real gentlewoman and saint of God."

"Don't run away with that last idea," said Mousie, laughing hysterically. "Adversity has taught me a good few things, and one of them is rebelliousness and swearing. If you want to know a 'saint of God,' I will introduce you to a hump-backed girl upstairs whose name is Phœbe Ray, and if ever there was a human sunbeam, it's she. She's a ray of real sunlight in this gloomy old 'apartment house.' You simply feel ashamed to grouse before her or say a 'damn,' when you know how hard she works and what a ghastly outlook there is for her in the future." She wished with all her heart that Gareth would not persist in canonising her, particularly as men had never any use in their lives for plaster saints. They loved human women full of faults and shortcomings—like herself, if Gareth only knew it! It maddened her to think that they were both lonely and in need of each other's companion-

ship and love, and would presently drift apart—he going to India, when, how easily they might throw in their lot together as man and wife! The hot blood coursed through Mousie's veins at the bare hint of such a possibility. She was sure it had not occurred to Gareth in his obsession for that other girl who had played him false. How dense men were, and how stupid it was that women could not be the first to suggest marriage without immediate loss of self-respect! It was only a convention after all, and one that clever women got around by artful and flirtatious ways! Mousie was angry with herself that she could not assume those ways to the desired end. If she attempted to try, she would no longer be herself, but someone so different and despicable, that Gareth would be repelled. It was odd, she thought, how some girls could do things successfully that was impossible to others! Of course it was all personality, —a wonderful thing, personality!

"I wish," said Gareth thoughtfully, "that you were a bit older, then you could come out and keep house for me. I should dearly love to have you take care of my house, Mousie. You are a past mistress at that sort of thing and I should be in clover. But it is a beastly censorious world and it wouldn't do at all."

"I shouldn't mind," said Mousie, the colour creeping into her face.

"Oh, you would—women in India are so catty. But let's be practical. If you would only let me pay your expenses, you would do well to take up a course of massage—it is the thing, nowadays. Or," seeing her face fall, "suppose you come out and try your luck as governess to a Rajah's kid. They like to employ Englishwomen for their children, so as to teach them the right accent and good English. No one need know that I am helping you till you can stand on your own feet. Of course, if you are very proud you can call it a debt, 'payable when able.'"

It was the best proposition, so far, and Mousie gave it her undivided attention. She liked the thought of being in India again and within reach of Gareth. "Oh, Gareth!—I wonder if I might do that?"

In her heart, she was blaming him for obtuseness in not seeing that there was a far better suggestion still. Didn't he know that she would be a wife in a thousand to him? Who would think more of and for him than she? Who would work for him—even slave for him, like she? with no thought for any other man living. She could now understand her mother's attitude towards life. It only proved how much she had loved her husband. Love makes wonderful sacrifices, and counts no cost too great for the sake of the loved one.

"Of course you can," said Gareth. "We must just think it over and see how it will work. You could stay at a boarding-house in Calcutta while I look about for this ideal job. Meantime, should anything good offer, you could take it temporarily—what?"

"Yes!—Could I get a passage on your boat?"

"It's full up, I was told."

"Try second class. I shouldn't mind going second class."

"In that case, I'll transfer, also, to the second class."

"No, indeed! I should not let you!"

They argued about it till Gareth left the house full of the new idea that was going to save Mousie from unspeakable drudgery and humiliation. He was glad of this new interest to keep his thoughts engaged and give him something to do. Poor little Elizabeth Errol! to have to suffer such privation because of the selfishness of her father! Since Mrs. Errol's pension had died with her, Mousie's, alone, was not enough to keep her in shoe leather. It was a criminal shame that such a nice, loyal-hearted girl should be driven to earn her daily bread by the sweat

of her brow. He wished that some reliable fellow would realise what a topping wife she would make! —a daughter of such a mother could not but be a perfect wife.

Gareth looked forward to returning to India and his work. Work was what he wanted, and plenty of it to drive thoughts of Lynette from his brain. If he could only despise her for a heartless vamp, condemn her as unworthy of a single pang of regret, his peace of mind would be restored and he able to make a new beginning. But he could not judge Lynette from the general view-point, for she was a product of the age and true to her type. Beautiful, fascinating, unconventional, almost unscrupulous in her determination to experience life, she was like a destroying angel. To be permitted to love her, was to glimpse paradise. To be cast aside, was to suffer unspeakably. She charmed consciously, with the art of the sorceress; but was generous with her gifts, because warm-hearted and passionate. It was not her fault that she had no depth in her butterfly nature; that she was incapable of great suffering, or pity for the suffering she inflicted; it was the way she was made—a thing of allure, created for the damnation of souls. That was how Gareth thought of her while worshipping the memory of her beauty and charm. The worst of it was, that he believed he would be quite ready to go to her if she called to him, and lie at her feet to be kicked out of the way, if no longer wanted; so great was her power to enslave. There had been women of her magnetism since the world began; and men willing to die for them, just as he was for Lynette, even though she had left him!

Gareth walked to the station to be alone with his thoughts, and wondered again about Lynette, trying to acount for her desertion of him when their union had been as near perfection as could be conceived in life. Was it because her experiment with love was

passing beyond her control that she had decided to disappear? Was she afraid that her escapade would be discovered by her husband and lead to publicity and the divorce court? Or on the other hand, was her lover's determination to take her to India, married or not, the cause of her flight? If her husband was in India, she had no option but to end the intrigue. If Gareth had only known the exact state of the case, how differently he would have planned! But he had believed she was a widow. She had deceived him! Yet he forgave her the wanton deception because of his love. He would remember those days in the Highlands till he died, and never cease to love her for her gift of her beautiful self, no matter how cruelly she had behaved.

Yet, in order to live his life, he would have to find distraction or go mad. In time, he would grow used to the void in his heart, and manage to get along, somehow. Till then, the care of Mousie would give him something to do, and keep his mind employed.

He was genuinely sorry and troubled for Mousie, in spite of the weight of apathy that had fallen on his spirits which was making him regard his fellow creatures as beings apart. It occurred to him that Mousie alone would be able to help him out of his Slough of Despond with her practical mind and sane outlook. She was always so dependable and true. He could not see Mousie do wrong consciously, or defy the law and the conventions of society for the sake of an experience. It did him good to associate with her and hear her ethics. There was a vigour about her that was refreshing—moral strength that was admirable. Certainly, the man who married Mousie would make a sound matrimonial investment. He hoped she would, for his sake, remain single for a while longer, or he would miss her horribly. At this crisis of his life, she was like a tonic to his wounded spirit. When with her he was conscious of the healing touch. In spite of her disclaimer, he

regarded her as one of God's saints—not the psalm-singing type, but the honest, vigorous sort, whose life was a wholesome example to others, and whose great tolerance was infinitely comforting to sinners.

During the week that followed, Gareth busied himself trying to secure a passage for Mousie, in vain. No vessel sailing about the time had a single berth available, which was very disappointing to them both. It would have helped him greatly if Mousie could have travelled with him, but it seemed that she would have to follow later.

Gareth formed the habit of calling on Mousie every day after luncheon, and taking her out in his car, after which they would dine at some quiet restaurant as Mousie was ashamed of her shabbiness, or return to her apartments where they supped on simple fare and talked till it was late, when Gareth reluctantly retired to his Club. He had never enjoyed Mousie's society so much as in these days when his greatest need was to be saved from himself. Though lonely and often depressed, she had the tact to lay aside her own heaviness that she might cheer Gareth and stimulate his dulness.

After a fortnight of such pleasant companionship, Gareth who had been provided with a latchkey to Mousie's rooms so as to save her dropping anything she was doing to open the door to his knock, let himself into the passage one afternoon while a fierce altercation was in progress in the kitchen, between her and a woman who lived on the same floor. Gareth could hear every word while he hesitated to rap on the half-open door and announce his arrival.

"I don't care wot you says, but we are respectable families in this block and won't put up with sech goings on as is 'appening 'ere. If you ain't a-going to be spliced, 'e's no business making free with your rooms and a latchkey on him too! It's enough to make your Mama turn in 'er grave, that it do, and she not long buried, neither!"

"How dare you insinuate anything so horrible!" gasped Mousie.

"Stow that! I am not afraid of your 'igh and mighty hairs, *woman!* You are the talk of these 'ere flats, with a man visiting you at all times, and you without no one to hact propriety! I warn you, my lidy fair, that you're going to get notice to quit, so don't be surprised if you are turned hout bag and baggige inter the street for being no better than you oughter!"

"Be silent!" cried Mousie. "How dare you insult me!"

"Insult the likes of you? My! Your proper place is Piccadilly. Your sort is past insulting. Respectable families don't bargain to be set alongside of loose women wot have gents visiting them at hall times of the day and night and calling to take them hout in *motor cars!*"

Gareth could bear no more, and flinging the door open stood glaring at the woman from the threshold. "Get out of this at once," said he. "You have no business to trespass into this lady's quarters. Get out, or you will be put out forcibly."

"You dare lay a finger on me!" she screamed, showing by her flushed face and puffy eyes that she had been drinking. "I'll let the whole neighbourhood know of the goings-on in this 'ere flat. It's a shame and a scandal, that's wot it is! and it's not me as is going to be put out, but her, your woman, as can't find a honest 'usband for 'er own but must needs be kep' by a swell, to her disgrace! She's a slut, that's what she is. My Gawd! an' so 'igh and mighty when 'er ma was alive, that nobody on the floor was good enough to be asked to sit down in 'er kitchen or given a cup of tea! And wot tea, I ask you? 'British and Colonies' second best as not even my cat will lap! We don't want her sort here, and the sooner you remove wot's yours the better for the respectability of the 'ouse, so there!"

Gareth took her by the shoulders and put her forcibly through the door, closing it in her face, after which he turned and faced Mousie who was bowed to the earth with humiliation at the thought that he had heard all the terrible things the woman had said.

"What a virago!" cried Gareth panting with rage and self-restraint. "Who is she, at all?"

"A neighbour who has tried hard to become intimate, but mother and I had to draw the line at her. She is common and drinks and is hardly responsible for all she has said. But—I cannot stay here. I shall have to get out. I suppose I can get cheap lodgings till I sail?"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" Gareth exclaimed full of pity and chivalry. Inspiration was alight in his glowing eyes. "You poor, persecuted little girl! I have just realised that I need you, Mousie, and will take it as a charity if you will throw in your lot with mine and marry me. Will you? Please—*please!*——" as he saw the shame and humiliation in her face.

"Gareth!" She was shocked; humiliated. For years she had longed and yearned for those words from him—"Marry me!" and now when he spoke them, she suffered agony.

"I mean it, Mousie!"

"Never, *never!* You don't! You are only trying to be kind—to spare me—or save gossip! How could you hurt me so!"

"I hurt *you?* Why, Mousie, you do not understand. I am too fond of you to do anything to pain you. The truth is——" and he took both her hands in his very humbly—"I am selfish in this. I just need you as I would a—a sister. I am all to pieces, and that's the truth—like a sick man. A very sick man in need of sympathy and kindness. Could you undertake the job of looking after me?—the fact is," he would not allow her to speak, so eager was he to soothe her self-respect, "I have often been tempted

to take my life. I am afraid of being alone, Mousie, and that's the truth."

Mousie swallowed a lump in her throat and looked pathetically up at him. "I would love to take care of you, Gareth. Isn't there any other way except through marriage?"

"There doesn't seem to be—you know how people carry on about such things. I should hate them to talk about you."

"It is very hard luck that you should have to marry me in order to be taken care of. Any old housekeeper can do that!" She laughed hysterically, knowing all the while that she would love to share his life under any circumstances. She would be glad to be his servant, his nurse,—his mother! She wanted to kiss the hands that held hers, only, never being given to crazy outbursts of emotion, she was admirably self-restrained.

"No hireling will give me the companionship that is so good for the soul. You suit me entirely, Mousie. I am really determined on this, if you don't mind?"

"But . . ." Mousie's eyes were lowered that he should not see the love and yearning in them for some warmer demonstration of his real affection for her, "suppose you fall in love some day and feel that you might have married, but for your Quixotism?"

"That will never be. The truth is—may I tell you a litttle of the truth about myself?"

"If you wish to. I don't ask you to tell me anything."

"It is just that I am down and out. I love someone so utterly, so madly—someone who has quite gone out of my life, that it is very unlikely there will be anyone I shall want to love in that way again. It feels rotten having to tell you this when I am asking you to be my wife, but it is as well that there should not be any misunderstandings or regrets,

afterwards. I would not suggest our marrying if there was anyone you cared terribly about and might marry some day. There isn't, is there?"

"Oh, no, and never will be," said Mousie firmly. "I have no vocation for the married state, my dear, so that the arrangement you want will suit me if it isn't likely to hamper you in the future or be something you are likely to regret? If it is a life-long pal you are looking for, I suppose I could be that as well as any man. We can each cultivate a hobby and enjoy smokes together in our dens when the spirit moves us to be confidential—how does that sound?"

"Topping! I shouldn't wonder that others will envy us our complete accord. I can't see ourselves as anything but an example of married tranquility to our neighbours."

"It will be rather a scream," said Mousie overdoing her part that he might not know how overjoyed she was at the prospect of living beside her beloved Gareth with the sanction of the law to silence gossip and give her the right to care for him and his home. She could not complain if he never made love to her as he had been perfectly frank so as not to raise false expectations. She would not be worse off in that respect than before, and a thousand times better off because of the privileges that would be hers. There would be nothing to hinder her from spending all her thoughts and energies on ministering to his comfort. He would be in danger of being thoroughly spoilt with care and attention. In her, Gareth would have all things except a wife, which the world would believe she was!—a comrade, a servant, a housekeeper, the very best friend in the wide world, capable of self-sacrifice, and self-effacement. Oh, she was quite ready for her job! "There is only one thing I want to know, if you do not mind telling me, and I will never ask another question on the subject for the rest of my life—that is, how are you so sure that—*she—has quite gone out of your life?*"

Gareth looked dreamily before him seeing nothing of the crude six-penny wall paper of purple roses and impossible leaves which had been responsible for much of Mousie's irritability in the days that were past, and answered listlessly—"It happened to turn out that she was married, Mousie."

"Oh!" Mousie was immediately full of pity. "She thought her husband was dead all the time?—I am so sorry! how terrible for her, poor thing!" (And all the while she had been blaming the girl for a heartless coquette!)

"No," said Gareth, impelled to be truthful to Mousie since he could make her believe any lie. "She knew all the while that he was living."

"And she did not tell you, but allowed you to fall in love with her?" It was incredible. How could girls be so mean!

"That's about what it was," said he, with anguished eyes.

"I think she must be very dishonourable. I am sorry to say anything harsh about someone you love, Gareth, but it wasn't playing the game."

"I—suppose not." He knew well that it was not, but it made no difference, now that he loved her so.

"All I can say is, that it is just as well she owned up when she did, and did not make you elope with her. It is the one redeeming point in the whole miserable story. She did not lead you into mischief and—and *sin*." Mousie's voice was fervently thankful for his escape from evil, and Gareth turned his face away.

"We men don't require much leading, my dear. Many are too ready to lead women astray."

"Not you! I would never believe that of you."

"My luck, perhaps, that I have never felt that way inclined."

"I am so glad, Gareth, that things did not go too far! You must just try to forget all about her, saying to yourself that any woman capable of acting so

dishonourably, would, sooner or later, let you down horribly. It is like being rotten at the core. Anyone without a keen sense of honour, is rotten, morally. A woman might be ever so attractive and radiate charm, but, if dishonourable and false at heart, all her charm and attractiveness go for nothing. She soon becomes hideous, I should think, in the eyes of those who loved her."

Mousie was sure that it was one of the devil's pitfalls in life that treacherous and mischievous characters should always be the most attractive outwardly. Everything that was really worth while having in the world, had, generally, to be looked for to be found—like precious stones in the earth. She could not forgive this woman for having stolen Gareth's heart merely for the gratification of her transcendent vanity, for that was what it had amounted to, if she had no intention of keeping it, but meant, all along to fling it away as worthless! What a pitiful end to his holiday! Better for his sake if he had never come—yet—if there was a fate in things, perhaps it was intended by the Arbiter of Destinies that he should learn through suffering the need of her who had given him all her love and prayers ever since she had first met and known him? How else could his eyes have been opened?

To Gareth, her words of wisdom were futile. Though convinced that she was right in her judgment in spite of her ignorance of more than a fraction of the truth, his feeling for Lynette remained unchanged. Lynette might be reckoned "bad," immoral, an adulteress; yet she was more to him than any woman living. He could now understand what "selling one's soul for love" meant. He would gladly have bartered his soul to find Lynette and to hold her again in his arms as in those halcyon days in Scotland.

However, to Mousie, he was mute. She would not understand.

CHAPTER VII

A GOOD SAMARITAN

WITH the chance of belonging to Gareth, Mousie felt she was on the road to complete happiness. Though he was not "in love" with her, he was fond of her, just as he had always been, and it was something to bank upon. If Gareth was fond of her, it was up to her to turn that fondness into love, even if the process took years to bring it off.

The most depressing part of it was, that she was not beautiful. If only she had been very pretty with masses of wavy hair and lustrous eyes, like pictures of professional beauties on the covers of chocolate boxes, it would not have taken long, she was sure, to make him forget that other creature and transfer his heart to the keeping of her whom he had made his wife. But the future did not present a roseate outlook whenever Mousie stared at her plain features in the glass. All her life, she had adored beauty and made dreams for herself in which she had been a perfect siren with demure lips and appealing eyes. It was cruel that the reality presented her reflection with a nose inclined to be tip-tilted and a wide mouth. They detracted so terribly, she knew, from otherwise good eyes and perfect teeth. Mousie also knew that she had a very perfect figure according to classic standards. But where was the use of being beautiful in parts that were never exposed to view? Only very lately she had been going without sleeves to her gowns since everybody was doing it, and the world

had the chance to observe how shapely were her elbows, how curved and dimpled. But there had been no one to care—not even now, with Gareth beside her, for he was blind to all that belonged to her. He had been so used to regarding her in the light of a sister or cousin, that she might have had a charwoman's elbows and thick ankles, for all he saw of them! Latterly, she had become very shabby, having to put up with old clothes done over, and hats of the simplest fashion. Her stockings were of artificial silk with darns and ladders mended till she was ashamed of her legs and tried her best to keep them out of sight. Her shoes, too, were in need of re-soling and only passed muster because she made them shine so bright that they might have been new, judged cursorily. As for her underwear! For years she had been obliged to do without the daintiness for which her soul craved and had worn the sort servants bought ready-made. Her pride was saved by not sending them to a laundry and doing all her washing at home.

The problem that faced her, was, how she was to manage to make a respectable appearance as Gareth's wife when she had no money to spend on a trousseau? Though he was never likely to see what she wore underneath, she hated to think that women might. It was exercising her soul desperately when Gareth came to drive her to a hotel. He had taken rooms for her and himself at a family hotel in Kensington, where they would be able to see each other constantly, have meals together, and consult each other till they started for India, man and wife. Now that Gareth had decided to give Elizabeth Errol the protection of his name, he was very much more at ease and resigned to the future. He would have a motive for fighting the yearning within him for Lynette's embraces, a sight of Lynette's beauty. Very resolutely, he determined to live down his passion till it atrophied and died.

Having begun to focus his mind on Mousie as Mrs. Wynstay, Gareth realised all of a sudden, her threadbareness, and scribbled on a cheque.

"When you are fixed up at the hotel, I want you to give yourself a fling in the best shops," said he. "And as that costs money, we'll draw a goodly sum from the bank to do it royally."

"Oh!" gasped Mousie. "I would rather not take any money yet from you, Gareth!"

"Why not? when we are to be married so soon?" He smiled.

"I don't like the idea," she persisted, which made Gareth hurry the arrangements, so that in a few days, they were married quietly at St. Mary Abbots in the High Street by special license, as Mousie did not feel that a registry office was anything but a joke. It might be legal enough, but, otherwise, it was such a mockery! Nevertheless, marriage to Gareth was almost a mockery of the sacredness of the ceremony, seeing that neither meant to keep the letter of the covenant. During the address, Mousie coloured furiously when the parson talked of the reasons why marriage had been ordained, and spoke feelingly of the love that was to bind them till death did them part. She was soothed when she likened her love for Gareth to the love of Christ for His Church—which was the only part of the service that had any relation to her act. All her vows she spoke with fervent sincerity, every syllable distinct. Gareth's were scarcely audible through a sudden realisation of the meaning of his undertaking. It was doubtful if he had ever read the marriage service through in his life or carried with him a memory of what he had heard at the few marriages he had attended in church. Whatever it was, his face looked very white and grave when he rose from his knees to follow the clergyman to the vestry, Mousie's trembling hand within his arm.

Both were strangely awkward and silent as they

returned to the hotel, or spoke inconsequently of things beside the point. When Gareth had recovered his bearings, he suggested that Mousie should employ her day in getting her outfit for India as they had very few days left and it was necessary that Mrs. Wynstay should be well dressed for the position she would have to occupy in society.

So Mousie, no longer troubled by pride and false scruples, jumped at the idea, glad of any occupation that would rob the situation of its embarrassment. Gareth made his way to the steamer agents to book passages, and Mousie shut herself for awhile into her room to be quite alone and appreciate to the full the wonderful thing that had happened. Actually, she was Mrs. Wynstay—Gareth's wife! her dreams had been at last fulfilled, and she was married to the one man in the world she loved and wanted for her own. They might not live together as husband and wife, but the fact remained, that he was hers and she was his—till "death did them part."

With shining eyes, she pinned on her hat and proceeded to demonstrate the fact that as far as "fine feathers made fine birds," she was going to be very fine indeed. With natural good taste and an eye for what was *chic* in clothes, she was at last able to indulge her desires for the sake of appearing well in her husband's eyes. She was determined to do him credit.

The first thing she did, was to drive to a West End hairdresser's and consult the manager.

Would shingling suit her? So many women were shingled these days. Or should she "bob"?

The manager studied her shape of head before replying, and decided that a long shingle would be very becoming to—he looked at the gold band on her third finger—"Madam," said he, "Madam has a well-formed head and she'll not know herself when her hair is cut and marcelled."

Mousie tremulously consented, and was glad she

had had the courage to sacrifice her insignificant locks for such a glory of ripples when the result was revealed to her by the aid of two mirrors.

She next called at one of the smartest shops in the West End, determined for the first time to be extravagant in a good cause. She would not buy quantities of dresses, but only as many as she would require as, at first, they would have to be black, and all the afternoon passed in making selections from Paris models—costumes, dresses, cloaks, evening gowns. It was past tea time before she could devote any attention to hats, and was delighted to find that there was very little trouble in suiting herself now that her hair was no longer in a bun behind. Mousie was afraid she was growing vain when her reflection showed what a miracle was performed by just a little good taste assisted by money. She hardly knew herself and wondered with a thrill what Gareth would say. Being in mourning, at least he would not be startled by bright colours.

Before turning back to the hotel, she spent an hour at a famous establishment committing wild extravagances in *lingerie*. Though no one would see her in the fascinating, flimsy things, her very soul gained wings of self-confidence at the bare thought of possessing such wonders of daintiness and grace. The exquisite silken, cobwebby things! how she thrilled at the feel of them, knowing that soon they would adorn her person. It was so easy to have assurance and manner when garbed from head to foot in lovely clothes! For the first time in her life, she was going to get her chance of looking well. She might not be a beauty, but already, her fine feathers had made her something akin to the idle rich in her smartness; a walking fashion plate—one of society's models that flashed about in public places as if the world was their playground.

Mousie was tired when she reached the hotel with her packages and boxes piled high in the hired car

Gareth had placed at her disposal, but happier than she had been in her life.

Gareth and she dined at a table by themselves and compared notes, she being too full of her day to keep her news a moment to herself.

"I shall begin wearing my things from to-morrow," said she with shining eyes, "and people won't know me. Will it look boastful if I run out to Hammersmith and call on Phœbe, the deformed girl, to bid her good-bye? I think she will be so glad to know that I haven't to skimp, and starve, and go shabby any more."

"Certainly, go. Besides, it will be something of a knock-out for the cat who insulted you if it is known that we are married. By the way," he cleared his throat awkwardly, "I am having some trouble about accommodation. Berths are all full up. It may be impossible to get two in separate cabins. I did not like to insist as they know I am taking out—my wife, so, you can imagine I was rather in a fix. A married couple having dropped out, there is a two-berth cabin available. Quite a decent size too. I—I did not know what to do, for you might not want to share a cabin with me—though, if it's a good size, we could manage somehow—a—not to interfere with each other. Or would you prefer following in the next boat?"

Mousie's cheeks were crimson and Gareth looked away.

"I—I should hate to let you go without me, Gareth!—if—if——"

"We can manage. There are heaps of ways of not intruding on each other. I could shave and dress in the bathroom—a——"

"I am sure we can manage," said Mousie, her eyes on her plate.

"Then I'll book the cabin."

Nothing more was said while Mousie was so glad, secretly, that she had bought dreams of nighties,

for there was no knowing—in case he caught sight of her, it was good to know that she would not look at all—a—unpresentable! It was certainly very awkward having to share a cabin with Gareth, though so natural in the eyes of the other passengers. She wondered if he would like her with her hair short, cut and waved in the style that was so fashionable at the moment.

However, she did not see Gareth any more that night after dinner, as he said he had promised to drop in on a fellow's people to say good-bye. They had met in the street and he had been made to promise to go over for coffee and bridge. Though he would rather have had a quiet evening with Mousie, he thought it best to do what he was asked to, especially as no one as yet knew they were married. "When it came to the pinch, somehow, I was dumb about it," he said blunderingly, to Mousie. "I have been getting horribly shy of late and don't seem to be able to talk."

"There wasn't any need to say anything. Are you putting an announcement in any paper?"

"No. What's the good? Do you wish it?"

"I am perfectly indifferent about it. There is no one I care particularly about, or want to inform of my doings."

"Then we'll just let it leak out in its own time. One hates to be stopped in public and congratulated, especially as the fact is no concern of anyone's."

"I agree with you," said Mousie who would have loved to publish the news from the housetops. The words, "I am married to Gareth," "I am Gareth's wife!" came involuntarily to her lips, again and again, only to be silenced with a glow of her heart and a burning thrill. Though there was to be no honeymoon, it was good enough to feel that she was no longer alone in the world but would live in close companionship with the only being that counted for

her, and be privileged to watch over his well-being and serve him with even greater devotion than a wife.

Gareth said good-night and left the hotel, while Mousie, tired and happy, slipped away to bed. Before falling asleep, she wondered if she had not been guilty of having taken a mean advantage of Gareth in his trouble. He was hardly himself, therefore not entirely responsible for his impulses. Because he had insisted, she had yielded to his proposition and bound him to her for the rest of his life! He had no love for her, no desire to make her his mate. What a farce of a marriage it was, and how unfair to himself! She, alone, was the gainer, and for awhile, she felt sorely ashamed and humiliated. What would he think of her if ever he came to his senses and realised to the full what he had done. Would he hate her for standing in the way of his happiness? . . .

Surely a time would come when he would outgrow his passion for the girl who had cheated him, and regret the folly of having burned his boats. There were heaps of lovely girls who would appeal to his imagination and whom he would wish he could marry —but for her—*Mousie*—for whom he had only chivalry and kindness.

What had she done! oh, what had she done! Mousie cried in her distress, and then prayed that, if ever Gareth had reason to regret his marriage, God would, in mercy, let her die quickly and release him. Feeling in a measure satisfied after leaving the issue with the Almighty, Mousie fell asleep to dream that she was going to have a baby and that Gareth would not speak to her as he said that it had no business to be born. He did not love her, so had no fatherly feeling for his child—"take it away and drown it."

Mousie awoke in a flood of tears and thanked God it was only a dream. As she was never likely to have a child, such a dream was utter nonsense. Dreams

were queer things, for she could not recall Gareth even kissing her!

To think that Gareth and she were husband and wife . . . and that this was the night of their marriage!

Mousie slipped out of bed and lighting a candle, looked at her full-length reflection in the mirrored panel of the wardrobe. Just for a moment, and for the first time in her life, she was astonished to think that she was the person opposite, staring drowsily at herself, she looked so pretty and soft and cuddlesome. That marvellous silk nightdress smothered in lace, with its clinging folds so inadequate as an enveloping garment, for her arms were nude, her shoulders exposed, and they looked so nice! She had never imagined how nice they were till set off by those flimsy folds of pearl-white silk. *And* her hair! What a difference it had made to her looks! What was prettiness, if she was not pretty to-night?

Mousie gave a choked sob, for this was her marriage night and—her bridegroom was playing bridge with his friends!

How mad she was to think about it at all! She scolded herself and crept into bed quivering from head to foot with nervous excitement and unsatisfied longing. Other girls who married slept in their bridegroom's arms. It must be wonderful, she imagined, to sleep in the arms of a lover who was one's husband! Gareth, however, was not her lover. The difference was that it was she who loved him! She loved him intensely and thrilled at the bare idea of the wonderful intimacy existing between married lovers. She thrilled and sighed again, then tried hard to woo sleep which seemed to have fled altogether.

A sound at her door froze her heart. Someone was trying the handle. As she had omitted to turn the key in the lock, the door opened to admit a man.

Never in her life had a man entered Mousie's bed-

room, and her throat was parched with fright. Who could dare come into it at midnight? Had anyone mistaken the door for his own? In the dim light of the moon through the open window, she saw that he was clad in a wrapper and had slippers on his feet. "Oh, my God!" she breathed, ready to spring from the bed—then she heard Gareth call softly, and her alarm turned to self-consciousness.

"Mousie!—I did not ask if I might come in as I thought, if you were awake, you would not mind. May I?"

"Yes, Gareth," she returned, as softly, her voice trembling and beyond her control. Involuntarily, she drew the bedclothes high about her, in virgin modesty.

"I—I could not sleep—so I thought that, since you and I now own each other, I could not do better than pass the night in here with you. Do you mind if I rest in this chair till morning?" indicating an upholstered seat near the fireplace.

"Oh, no. Please do as you wish."

"Thank you. Am I disturbing you greatly?"

"Not at all," said she, almost inarticulate for the pounding of her heart. (How she longed to say, "Come in here to me, and share my pillows. Oh, Gareth, if you could only love me a little!")

"You are very good to me, little Mousie! The fact is," said he, throwing himself into the easy chair, "I have got into the habit of sleeping abominably. Sometimes I cannot sleep at all. I am almost afraid of the nights, they are ghastly when one doesn't sleep and watches the hours slip by. Ever since my illness, I have been a poor sleeper and it is the mischief if one resorts to drugs."

"You—you mustn't do that!"

"It is very selfish of me to barge in on you like this. Don't mind me, perhaps I'll drop off to sleep here. It is rather a change to have you to run to when I am feeling so rotten. You are a born

Samaritan, Mousie. How few girls there are with your tolerance and sympathy!"

"I never knew you were such a sufferer," said Mousie forgetting herself in her anxiety and pity. "It must be terrible not to sleep when you are worn out and tired! Suppose you take my bed and let me have the chair?"

"What an idea! as if I could dream of doing such a thing! Go to sleep, old dear, I believe I am better already. It is so nice to know you here. I only wonder you can put up with me!" His voice sounded drunk with sleep, so Mousie made no reply, hoping with all her heart that he would go off quietly into dreamland, and wake in the morning, refreshed.

After awhile, she heard him breathing regularly, and her heart warmed with hope and satisfaction. Sleep lowered the vitality, so that it was possible, Gareth would wake up feeling chilled. Very silently, she crept out of bed and, taking her eiderdown quilt which was warm but of no weight, she laid it over his knees and tucked it with fairy-like touches into the chair at his waist. One of her pillows she laid close to his cheek as his head was gradually slipping sideways. Presently, it would come to rest on the pillow and his comfort would be assured. When her ministrations were finished, she stooped guiltily and kissed a curl of his hair, then tip-toed back to bed where, aglow with love and happiness, she actually fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

A TWO-BERTH CABIN

GARETH was very grateful to Mousie the next morning when he awoke refreshed from slumber and appreciated what she had done for him. A running tap and splashings in the bath, told him where she was, and he waited, wondering about her and himself. What he had done last night was rank selfishness, and she had been a saint to have tolerated him. She could not be in love with him, he told himself modestly, as there had never been any tender passages between them. They had been more like pals, yet she had made no objection to his entering her room when she knew that he was not acting the part of the eager bridegroom! Wonderfully tolerant of her. Now that he was feeling better, it was time he got out and gave her a chance to have the room to herself. Yet, he did not see why there should be any barriers erected between them if they stood in intimate relationship to each other. He even looked forward to the privilege of walking in and out of her apartments just as though she were pleased to give him the right. They belonged to each other and it was absurd that she should object to his presence in her rooms any more than he should mind if she walked into his without knocking first. He was very fond of Mousie and if there had never been Lynette in his life, he was sure that his affection would have warmed into love which would have led him into matrimony with her, as Mousie was the safest invest-

ment in the way of a wife that a man could make. He would always be able to rely on her. He had never given a thought to Mousie's looks, either to criticise them or wish that she had been beautiful. She was a necessary factor in his life and therefore independent of beauty. Mousie had always stood to him as a mental safety valve, and now that he had gained the right to keep her always, he saw no sense in treating her other than he would any boy who had come to live with him. There was no question of sex—he was sure she herself would resent it if he brought that element into their pleasing companionship. Thinking on these lines, he cast about him for a cigarette and fetching one from a packet on the mantelpiece, he lighted it from matches in a box at hand. Mousie smoked and would never object to his doing so in her bedroom. If she did, he would retire to his own room and finish his weed there. Presently, she would come out of her bath and take the chair opposite the fire for a good old "confab." He looked forward to the time when they two, like pals, would feel as free in each other's society as beings of the same sex.

He was quite sure he had done with sex reactions for a long time to come. Emotion was exhausted, passion dead since Lynette had disappeared.

Gareth wandered about the room and came to anchor in a window that looked out on a busy thoroughfare, as Mousie, emerging from her bath and thinking he had left the room because his chair was vacant, came forward unconcernedly, very scantily clothed.

When her eyes met Gareth's she thought she would have fainted; only Mousie's mental balance and steady nerve were things that never deserted her in a crisis. Only for a moment, she flinched, then took refuge behind an assumed unconcern. The look of shy surprise in Gareth's eyes helped her considerably, for her woman's instinct told her that he was seeing

for the first time, something to admire in her, and the thought thrilled her to the core.

Mousie was aware that she was very perfectly modelled, and since Gareth was the only man in the world who had the right to her rooms, she felt that it would be the mistake of her life if she behaved with prudery towards him. She wanted his admiration and love, and life had taught her that men were not always proof against visions of feminine beauty. So, in spite of natural modesty, she steeled herself to indifference, her woman's pride supported by the knowledge that he was there of his own accord. She had not invited him to her room!

"I thought you had gone," she remarked over her shoulder as she proceeded to robe.

"Do you wish me to go?"

"You must always do as you like, Garry," she replied sweetly. "I don't mind if you wish to stay."

"I would like to stay," said he, keeping his eyes on the treetops after one fleeting glance at Mousie which had quickened his pulses. He had never dreamt that Mousie was so—so . . . "You have been cutting off your hair?" he remarked, determined not to annoy her by looking again.

"Yes," she laughed, pleased with the fact of his having noticed it. "I did it yesterday. Do you like it?"

As she had hair that waved naturally and was easy to keep in curl, her head was a pretty sight with its shingled mop that followed the shape of her well-formed head.

"I would hardly have known you. I think it suits you."

"You only think!" she challenged, flushed and vivacious, and Gareth was forced to turn and inspect the vision before the dressing-table which had very little resemblance to the Mousie he had always known. The surprise of the transformation was so great that he did not find it easy to speak. He only

knew that he was so pleased for her sake that she was at last able to do justice to herself.

"No," said he. "I am quite sure of it. You have just the head for that style, and, I like what you have on—how very pretty!"

Mousie blushed. It was the first time in all her life that a man was privileged to see her dressing, and her heart beat to suffocation. More than ever was she glad that she had allowed her artistic taste free play, the day before, in the matter of her trousseau. The *crêpe-de-chine* was good, the lace real, and the shape and cut modern and brief, so that while gracefully clothed, the art of the designer had left little of Mousie's beautiful form to the imagination. Gareth thought that she need envy few women their limbs and figure, and what had she done to make her face so youthful and sweet? If not actually pretty, it was one that he imagined would grow on those who knew and loved her, till it was better than beautiful. Being always fond of Mousie, he was glad at the improvement and voiced his pleasure to her supreme gratification.

"I suppose it's the hair, but I have never known you look so well, Mousie. Why—you are really very pretty. Did you know that?"

"Nonsense, Garry! I am the same girl I have always been, only I never had the chance to make the most of my looks. However, I am glad to be a credit to you, since I am to be presented to your friends."

"I shall be very proud of you," said he, finding the study of her a pleasing occupation.

He was unable to help the memory of other visions intruding on him. Lynette under such intimate circumstances, was always a temptation to him to make love. Their's had been a mad, enchanting honeymoon. Oh, the glamour of those wonderful days! —the pain of remembrance! With a sigh he

sauntered from the room, saying that it was time he thought of going to his bath.

Mousie saw him go, feeling that she had at least gained a step in advance. Gareth knew he had the freedom of her rooms, and he had actually called her pretty! With the rich colour dyeing her cheeks, she finished dressing, then descended to the lounge to meet him for breakfast. The thought of the ocean voyage came with many thrills to remind her that a cabin had very little space, and that they two would share it. Moreover, the journey was a long one. With tact and patience, it was not impossible for her to make Gareth forget the woman he had loved so foolishly for the one who loved him. A wife had a wonderful pull if she were wise enough to know how to use it!

Gareth's preoccupied manner for the rest of the day while they made the final arrangements for leaving England on the morrow, was a set back to Mousie's spirits. He had the same taken-for-granted air that made her feel, most of the time, how little she counted to him beyond companionship. It was nice doing things together instead of alone, and that was all it amounted to.

At last, the ship. One of the new boats with larger cabins and modern comforts. It carried a full complement of First Class passengers and the Second Saloon was crowded to the last available berth.

Mousie had never travelled First Class before, and instinctively gained in self-importance over the dignity. Her father had never been able to afford the higher fare, so she had been accustomed to a mixed crowd of both sexes and cramped accommodation between decks. It was very different now. Their cabin had dainty iron beds with spring mattresses, wardrobes in which to hang her dresses, and every other comfort that could be devised including electric fans, lights and bells, and a large porthole for fresh

air which could remain open throughout the voyage as it was well above the possibility of shipping waves.

Gareth had not been near her that last night in the hotel, feeling that he had no right to take too great an advantage of her good nature, so Mousie was keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement while wondering how he would behave towards her the first time of sharing the one room.

Eventually, no one could have proved more considerate, for he kept up on deck very late, till Mousie had retired to sleep, then crept in noiselessly, undressed in the dark, and got cautiously into his bed so that she should not be disturbed. The springs however rebelled against his weight and creaked so noisily that Mousie laughed.

"I am so sorry!" said his voice in the darkness.

"You need not be. I was not asleep," came from Mousie.

"What a sport you are, Mousie!" he returned. (Then)—"I have been wondering . . ."

"What have you been wondering, old thing?"

"A—if——" his voice faltered, making her feel that Gareth was glad of the darkness to hide his embarrassment. "I have been thinking over things and wondering," said he putting it differently though very shyly, "if it is necessary for us—to—to go on in this way."

Mousie was silent, not knowing quite what he meant and afraid to read a meaning that might end in wounding her pride.

"Which way, Garry?" she asked nervously.

"The way we are doing," said he. "This aloof stunt—you know—behaving like—like a couple of strangers instead of—er—what we are," he ended boyishly.

"*Husband and wife,*" put in Mousie in low tones.

"Yes." Silence, while the darkness throbbed about Mousie's ears. "You see, I believe I need

you, Mousie, not only as a pal but as a wife. Shall I come over and try to explain?"

"Of course, Garry," came almost inarticulately from her.

There was a sound of more creaking and a rustle of bedclothes, and Garry sat down on the edge of Mousie's bed and leaned over her, one of his large muscular hands stroking the hair back from her brows in the darkness. "It is like this," he said, somewhat breathlessly. "I feel, somehow, that I have no right to expect you to be good to me when you know how it has been with me, recently. I don't feel the same fellow I used to be. I can't take an interest in things, and—and—it feels like—impossible for me to be madly in love—like that—with any woman again as long as I live. I suppose it is like a sickness of the mind and needs treatment. I have got to fight the oppression, or depression, all I am worth, so as to get back my balance, and I badly need help. There is no one who can help me like you, Mousie, because I have always been so fond of you. You made your way right into my heart long ago, though I did not realise it so much as now, and will stay in your own particular niche whatever happens of good or ill. I don't think I can get along without you, Mousie, right close in my life. It is like when a fellow is knocked out of time, there is no one he wants so much as a woman for his doctor with the heart of wife and mother, combined. Now that we are together, I am already better and am beginning to think, if you don't mind, and care enough about such a selfish brute, there is no reason for us to be so—so—distant? . . . I do believe that with someone to care about, things will be very different. The fact that I have someone to work for and serve, I shall never again be tempted to—to—pop off, as I so nearly did, a while back."

"Oh, Garry!" cried Mousie with tears in her voice, "never feel like that again!"

"Would you mind very much if I went, little Mousie?"

"It—it would *kill* me!" said she, with a sob.

Gareth stooped and found her lips in the darkness. "Poor kid! You like me, Mousie?"

"I—I have always—*loved* you, Garry!" She was frank, instinctively and unerringly.

"Is that true?—an ungrateful beggar like me?"

Mousie drew his face to hers affectionately. "I am just enjoying being your wife, Garry." This was no time for false pride or reserve.

"True?—and I such a darned obtuse idiot?" He kissed her again, and though his kisses lacked the fire of passion, they were very sweet, and Mousie felt that at last she was entering into her kingdom.

"You are tremendously good to me, Mousie," he whispered his breath sounding uneven. "Do you know, yesterday morning, when I was in your room —I thought you looked so pretty! In fact, ever since, I have been wondering what a blind bat I have been all these years not to have seen all the wonderful things you are!"

"That is why you stayed away?" (For he had not repeated his visit to her room in the hotel.)

"I felt that I had no right—that I would have to get your permission, like—now."

"Oh, Garry!—I—belong to you, and I am so glad."

"Thank you, little wife."

CHAPTER IX

THE PLANTER

GARETH learned fully to appreciate Mousie as a wife when, on his arrival in India, he learned that he was posted to that dead-and-alive station in Bengal known as Gungaserai, "*miles* from any European," he was informed. When they arrived by car, it was to find that the station was populated by communities of Hindus and Mohammedans who regarded each other with animosity, and that the Magistrate whom Gareth was relieving, was the only European in the place. As the retiring official was a bachelor who had never taken kindly to life in India, Gareth was not given a good impression of the station, which he was told was a "God-forsaken hole."

"I don't know how your wife will stand it," said he, while Mousie superintended the unstrapping of the luggage. "One of the reasons I don't marry! Women can't stick the dullness of *mafasil* life, and it's hell to be married and live a grass-widower! Gungaserai is as dull as a church, without a soul to speak to, unless litigation brings one of the landowners in from the district, or an indigo planter comes over from the other side of the river for a week-end. It isn't often they want to drop in here, for there's nothing doing but duck shooting if you're keen. The doctor is an Indian; the deputy, an Eurasian; and the entire official staff is composed of

Bengali Babus. I am glad I am getting out of here, and don't congratulate you, Wynstay."

"How's the place?—unhealthy?"

"Middling. It's not too bad. There are many worse. One has to take the usual precautions when epidemics are about. Personally, I never drink water. It amazes me, though, how the place swarms with humanity, and how well the children look. The bazaars are teeming with them." They talked "shop" while Mousie was absent, and Gareth learned that Gungaserai was a law-abiding district, save at times of religious festivals, when a great deal of tact had to be used and some precautions taken to keep the Hindus and Mohammedans from flying at each other's throats.

It was a good thing that Mousie was not unable to exist without social life and entertainment, or she would have looked upon Gungaserai as penal servitude. Mousie was brought up to be independent of her circumstances, and her cheery optimism under difficulties, won Gareth's admiration and made him very grateful. She was what he designated as "a real sport" when she threw herself, heart and soul, into turning the little bungalow at Gungaserai into "home."

It was a very ordinary bungalow such as subdivisions often boasted—thatched and picturesque, in the midst of tropical foliage, and with a garden overgrown with healthy, flowering shrubs. The river ran below the bank on which it stood, and spread its turgid waters over shallows and quicksands to the opposite shore, which, in the far distance, looked indefinite and blue. The station knew only one road, which was the Government road, and led north and south through the district to other divisions and sub-divisions, and kept Gungaserai in touch with the surrounding country. A branch railway came to its terminus in the station, and was controlled by a Hindu gentleman who dressed in a black

alpaca tunic, white cotton trousers and a velvet cap. He was good-tempered and obliging, for which the Wynstays felt thankful. For there are many ways in which a stationmaster could annoy.

As was commonly done, the new Sub-divisional Officer took over the furniture and some of the effects of the retiring Magistrate, so that Mousie had to make the most of what was to hand. It did not matter if she disliked the quality of the furniture and felt that she could never express her own individuality in a place that was furnished originally by someone altogether without taste and handed on, just so, to successive Magistrates in turn. She was not new to the system, and merely accepted the situation like a philosopher. She was grateful for the ice chest and Pasteur filter, and glad that Gareth had his own crockery and cutlery, glassware and linen.

The matting on the floors was of plaited bamboo; there was a great deal of useful camp furniture, but the kitchen pots and pans she immediately condemned, and wrote to Calcutta by the first post for an entire set in aluminium. To Gareth, she confided her pity for bachelors in India, whose welfare was at the tender mercies of Indian servants.

"What do men know about domestic economy?" she said indignantly. "To think that he should have been running such risks as chipped enamel in his food or copper poisoning from vessels badly plated! It is positively wicked. I wonder he is alive!"

"Providence looks after drunkards and fools, we have been told," said Gareth, "to which let us add —'bachelors and deserted husbands in the East.'" Mousie's enthusiasm concerning the welfare of the home, gave him much entertainment, and in his leisure moments, when not occupied by his official duties, he liked helping her to get things as right as it was possible to make them. Discoveries, such as a crystal flower vase of antique pattern, or a piece

of old china which had been sold time and again in job lots and had survived the carelessness of Indian servants, were "finds" to rejoice over and discuss with proper appreciation as over the acquisition of an unexpected fortune.

"These old Indian houses must often have quite rare relics in the way of old stuff like people pick up in junk shops at home. Did you notice that the dishes called 'plated,' and sold among dinner-table fittings, are Sheffield?"

"*No!*—really?" Mousie was thrilled.

"After all, it's good to meet with compensations in a place like this," said Gareth, laughing, for Mousie had a passion for antiques.

"It is—but I am not sure that we should not draw the late owner's attention to his mistake, which is a real loss, when you come to think of it."

"Not at all," said Gareth, "for he probably bought it from the fellow before his time, for a trifle; and that fellow did the same. It is surprising how ignorant people are about the value of things. We have come by the articles quite fairly, so there is no obligation on us to feel robbers."

They washed the crystal vase till it glittered as it had not done for years, and put the china plate on the wall, while the Sheffield dish, gifted with intelligence, would have been immensely gratified at the dignity it achieved on the sideboard, all the tarnish having disappeared under treatment, and its native silver coming once more into its own.

Mousie was busy from morning till night, sewing, washing, renewing, with the Mohammedan *kitmutgar* (or "butler" as he liked being called) and the Ooryia bearer, to assist. With new bedding and fresh curtains, polished furniture and a carpet or two out of Gareth's own stock, brought to them by train out of storage, the bungalow presented a very different aspect to that which it had worn when Mousie first sensed its possibilities.

There were the long verandahs protecting the rooms from the setting sun on one side and the rising sun on the other, which Mousie made artistic between the pillars with ornamental plants and hanging baskets of ferns.

"You are sure you are not encouraging snakes?" was all the discouragement Gareth offered, for he liked to see the artistic result of her labours.

"Mother always had plants in her verandahs, and I don't think we saw more than one snake in the house in years!" was her reply.

"You have made this little place very homelike and pretty!" said Gareth appreciatively. "Aren't you sorry we can't show it off to a crowd of neighbours?"

"I am rather glad we haven't neighbours to drop in constantly, as in big stations, and distract one from the things that matter."

"Then you are not in danger of getting bored stiff with the loneliness of the district?"

"Bored? I love Gungaserai because it is lonely and I have the pleasure of keeping my husband all to myself. It is very selfish, I know, and I wonder sometimes, how you will stick it with only poor me for company?" (Women like Mousie make these mistakes out of sheer modesty and humility.)

"I cannot tell you," said Gareth in all sincerity, "what a comfort it is to have no club at which I must be sociable and popular; no demands on my leisure for bridge and garden parties. If I want exercise, I'll ride. If I want companionship, I have the best of pals at my elbow. It is great to be able to please oneself, and I shall probably take up writing as a hobby, some day. I have always wanted to write—perhaps fiction—articles to the home papers. Blackwood has published for me before. You see, I have nothing to regret, if *you* are content."

"Then that's that! I hope the Government will

forget all about us for, at least, a year and not bother us with another transfer."

Gareth in the little room Mousie had furnished as his "den," would often steal a look across at his wife whose easy chair occupied a position by the window, and watch her busy with household mending or darning his socks. She made a very pleasant picture of domesticity, and the sweetness of her face made her quite pretty to his biassed mind. Hers was undoubtedly a face that grew on the eyes of affection, till every small blemish was part of its charm. Mousie had indeed done wonders for him, and he was fully aware of the fact. Though he would never love her in the same mad fashion that had marked his infatuation for Lynette, who had given him the keys of heaven and of hell, he had become attached to her and dependent upon her for the veriest trifles in daily life. Some women have the instinct for making themselves indispensable to men. Mousie's mother had made a helpless child of her husband, in his home, and fostered his selfishness till it dominated everything, and Mousie showed the same love of service which anticipated her husband's wants and supplied them ere he had discovered his needs. It was very weak and perhaps foolish, but men are susceptible to such spoiling, and by such means, Gareth was beginning to feel he could do nothing without his wife. Even matters of importance had to be discussed with her and her advice taken. Gradually, Gareth realised that Mousie's opinions were wise and sound, so that it was a relief to throw the burden of a troublesome decision on her shoulders and act blindly on her judgment when doubting his own.

Never had he known so much comfort though he had always had good servants to minister to his bachelor-needs. Mousie in the home meant a well-kept house, clean service, respectful servants, good food. Her attention to every detail of housekeeping made for economy and efficiency so that there were

never any unpleasant surprises such as the ice running out, no sodawater till the new supply arrived, and stores falling short. Nor was he ever called upon to interfere in domestic matters and remonstrate with an insolent servant. If a servant did not behave according to Mousie's standards of excellence and was impudent, he was dismissed and as the wages were good and she was sympathetic in times of sickness and trouble, the bungalow staff at Gungaserai were reasonable and faithful in the performance of their duties.

Thus, in the months that passed, as the seasons changed from a muggy autumn to the cold of a Bengal winter, Gareth's marriage to Elizabeth Errol proved a complete success. His memory of Lynette was locked safely away in the recesses of his soul, never to be consciously refreshed by introspection. In time, it would fade altogether and the sore places in his heart be healed. Till then, he carefully erased from his possessions every trace of that holiday in the Highlands. Snapshots and hotel bills were destroyed with that last little note of farewell. A glove she had worn, a ribbon, a rose, were consumed by flames in a little pile with waste paper and accumulated rubbish, and Gareth felt that it was best so. He owed it to Mousie who had never once asked questions or tried to pry into his past, though she knew enough to have made her for ever curious.

Their first visitor was a planter from across the river, who was anxious to make the acquaintance of the new Magistrate and his wife. He was another of those deserted husbands of whom India is full, with a wife and child in England, because, it was said in the bazaars, the loneliness of her husband's circumstances and the unhealthiness of his district, made it undesirable as a permanent abode for them. Moreover, incompatibility of temper had made life a hell for husband and wife, which Mr. Riley frankly confessed to the Wynstays, so that he had nothing

to complain about concerning the separation, except that he had been a "dam' fool" to have married at all, and of all women, one who had been bred to society life and plenty of entertainment. His only consolation was that he was not the only one. There were heaps like him—take Bob Oathwait, for instance, out Talbegan way——"

"Bob Oathwait?" asked Gareth, surprised. "Is he at Talbegan?"

"Been there for some time, poor devil, all among the sandbanks and alligators, sending every bean home to his wife and living on *dhal* and rice and chutneys like a native. You know him?"

"Once my best friend," said Gareth. "I was to have been best man at his wedding, but had a go of malaria and couldn't get there. He was married at Darjeeling to a girl friend of his sister, Mrs. Shannon. Shannon was Private Secretary to the Governor when his wife chaperoned Miss Arden on the voyage out. I believe she is very charming."

"So much so, that she couldn't exist where there were no men for her to charm. Oathwait was a rising man, for he was generally picked out to do all the tricky engineering jobs in outlandish spots. He was an ass to marry when he hadn't any settled abode. Half the time he was out in the jungles laying a railroad, building bridges, or irrigating deserts, so what did he expect? Either she had to live with him in camp, pining for social life, or up at Darjeeling where she played the devil with the boys at the *depôt*." Peter Riley glanced at the door to be sure that Mousie was not within hearing, and continued, lowering his voice—"Then came the baby, and all that gossip—you know?"

"I believe I heard something about it, but as I was on that commission to Burmah, it escaped my mind. What was it all about?"

"Gossip doubted the parentage of the child, that's all, and Oathwait did not seem ever the same again.

He dried up like a clam and sent her home with the kid. I guess she swore black and blue that it was his. I saw her once, and must say she was very fascinating and pretty."

"And you say that Bob is at Talbegan?"

"Building a dam or something—no, he was sent, now I remember, to build a breakwater to save some government mills on the Ganges, as the river is cutting in dangerously near to the factories and may demolish the whole place."

"It's a good way from here, isn't it?"

"Almost three hours journey by water, but a car would do it in an hour."

"I should like to see him again," said Gareth, recalling the friendship that had existed between them and how disappointed he had been at not being able to attend the wedding. "I might take a run down on Sunday—only—I don't like leaving the wife."

"Don't let that worry you, for I can easily get over and stand by in your absence. It is refreshing to meet a lady and enjoy a bit of her society after months of the jungles. See this suit?" he indicated the tweed he was wearing. "I got it made at home when I was there before the war. How's that for economy and care? It has lived in storage as I never get a chance to wear it. Only on very special occasions it comes out from its tin-lined case. Otherwise I live in pyjamas."

"I have never been able to keep clothes so long," said Gareth. "Usually the moths or whiteants riddle it."

"You haven't an airtight case."

"If you'll spend next week-end with us, I'll run out for the day to Talbegan," said Gareth.

"With pleasure, if Mrs. Wynstay will put up with me."

"I am sure she will be delighted to entertain you."

When Gareth told his wife of the arrangement, she

grimaced, for she had not taken to Peter Riley at all, though she kept the fact to herself, feeling that it was good for Gareth to see other men before he was fed up with life and realised the need of outside companionship.

Peter Riley had something in his eyes she did not like. What it was she could not have said, but, instinctively, she did not trust their expression, nor the way he had of allowing his gaze to wander over her person and fasten on lines and curves that appealed to the beautiful in art. She was not a statue and, moreover, it was rude. She had the inspired feeling that his wife was not altogether to blame when she refused to live with him. He did not impress her as a type of faithful husband.

These things, however, she did not care to speak about even when alone with her husband, but she was not enthusiastic at the idea of having to entertain him without Gareth, that coming Sunday.

Peter Riley showed openly by his manner that he was interested in Mousie. "Mousie"! What a quaint nickname, and how suitable, he told her, because of her quiet voice and gentle manners. She moved around silently and busily all the time, and was always on the alert to run away if she imagined she was useful elsewhere.

"No one but Gareth calls me 'Mousie,'" said she. "And he invented it when we travelled out to India on the same boat, years ago, because I was too shy to come into the limelight of deck games and sports. Afterwards, when I was afraid of nothing, the name still stuck, as nicknames do."

"I like it, awfully," said Peter. "I could never think of you as 'Elizabeth.' You are nothing like an 'Elizabeth.'"

Mousie wanted to say that there was no need for him to think of her at all, only she hated to be "snubby."

She was beginning to wonder what was the matter

with the generation that husbands and wives were so much happier to live apart. Were there none like herself and Gareth who were content to give and take, equally? Or was it because it was always best if the wife loved her husband more than he loved her—as in her case? for it, then, made her stick to her post through thick and thin and, for ever, strive to be all-in-all to him, so that he would learn, in the end, that he could not do without her. The other way round generally ended in broken homes and mutual callousness.

CHAPTER X

EPISODES BY THE WAY

DURING that week, Mousie made the acquaintance of the wives of some of the Indians in Government service, and she found them enlightened women who were a pleasure to know; simple, and with little experience of life, never having been beyond the four walls of their dwellings except in covered palanquins or shrouded motor cars. Her first introduction to one of them was while passing with Gareth along a rural lane and hearing a great din of Indian music proceeding from behind an overgrown hedge which surrounded the premises of the Rural Sub-registrar. It appeared that there were festivities of some sort going on, for there was a clamour and chatter of tongues like at a bazaar; and as they came abreast of the gate, they could see that the poor of Gungaserai were being fed. Hundreds of them were seated on their haunches on the ground within the gate, and Indians in the service of the Sub-registrar, were doling out uncooked rice and *dhal* into the chudders of the men while the women make packets in the corners of their *saris*. Just then, the Sub-registrar himself caught sight of Gareth and Mousie and saluted them with a *salaam*. This was returned, and the Indian hurried out to meet his chief and the memsahib. Thereupon, a conversation took place at the gate.

"You see, Sirr," said the Indian with a wave of his hand at the lively scene, rendered bewildering by

the rhythmic beating of a tom-tom, the clashing of cymbals and the wild arpeggios of a reed proceeding from a group of musicians seated cross-legged upon a mat in the yard, "this is a veree *aus*picious *oc*casion. I am one proud man this day, as the betrothal of my daughter, Sushi, is being celebrated."

"Indeed!" said Gareth, and Mousie added her exclamation denoting sympathetic interest. "Who is she going to marry?"

"One graduate of the *Cal*cutta University. It has been at great cost that this marriage has been arranged, for young Bannerjea, son of my old friend, is highly educated, being a B.A., failed. It is not so easy to arrange marriages for daughters, in these days, Sirr, with such scarcity of income and salaries so microscopical. However, Sirr, the dowrie was forthcoming. Sushi is the last of my daughters, by God's blessing, and too young at present to understand her great felicity; or comprehend at what a cost it has been procured. The young gentleman will make a great position for himself by his education, and I am hoping for your favour, Sirr, to speak for him to the *A*ccountant General for a clerkship."

While he was speaking, a little girl climbed on the gate and swung with it on its hinges, while a swarm of her playmates jumped and capered about her. She was the heroine of the hour, Sushi herself, for the children addressed her by name, and her father smiled blandly as she screamed volubly for his approval. From a window in the whitewashed dwelling, venetian blinds were lifted to allow many pairs of eyes to peep forth on the animated scene.

"Is that your little girl?" asked Mousie, full of interest.

"Yes, Madam," said the father proudly, while others, doubtless male relatives, drew closer, curious to know what was being said. "She is a veree clever child and from now says she will receive education.

She shows great independence of thought and what will be in the future, who can say! so many female children demand education!"

"But why not? Think of the interest it gives in life to be able to enjoy books and newspapers," said Mousie.

But the Sub-registrar shook his head dubiously. "Also there is great harm, Madam; for with education comes unrest. Will these little ones, now growing up, submit to the law of our faith which enjoins seclusion as being good for female morality and the peace of mankind. They too will be demanding equal rights with men—*tobah!*"

"What does your wife think of the idea of education for girls?"

"That is the great bone of contention, Madam, which rends the tranquility of our domestic life. How she herself clamours for more freedom! How she argues like a lawyer till I have no words to answer her rhetoric—alas!—shame! This is a contentious age, Madam."

"I should love to call on your wife. Do you think I might see her?"

"Certainly, Madam. It will give me great pleasure to escort you to her chamber, if Mr. Wynstay will excuse to me?"

As Gareth found something of municipal interest to talk about to one of the Sub-registrar's guests who held a position in the municipality, Mousie left him at the gate and followed her host to the house and into the presence of his wife who was surrounded by her female relations. She was a lovely creature with almond-shaped eyes as dark as sloes, and a pale tan complexion such as women have in the North-western provinces. She was very young and there was a look of settled melancholy in her eyes, while her scarlet mouth drooped at the corners discontentedly.

Her husband introduced Mousie to her and retired,

leaving his wife to do the honours alone, and Mousie was surprised to see how ably she rose to the occasion.

"It is a kind thought of the lady," she said in Hindustani, "and I am much pleased to see her."

"You are very good to receive me," said Mousie.

"Sushi!" called her mother. But Sushi was still riding on the gate. "That child! she is but an infant still!—let her play. You, Bhaini, get a seat for the lady. She cannot be asked to sit like ourselves on the floor." Instantly, a girl in a silk *sari* fluttered from the room and returned almost immediately with a chair which she placed for Mousie. When Mousie was seated, Sushi's mother settled herself on a mattress, cross-legged, and entered easily into conversation. She told her visitor all that she thought would interest her about the betrothal ceremonies, and then probed for knowledge of English customs and ways.

To one so anxious to learn and to whom the simplest facts of travel were mysteries and magic, it was a fascinating task to describe and instruct. Time flew while the women listened gaping. Mousie was glad that her previous sojourn in the East had made her familiar with the language so that she could convey her thought without halting too often for a choice of words.

"Myself, I am full of admiration for the white people," said the wife. "Some there are who would make us believe this and that; but I say, to them we owe everything, even the peace of our times. My old father died telling me never to give heed to those who would upset law and order, for then there will be no peace again for a hundred years. It is a great privilege you *Belaiti* women have to go and come without the need to conceal your faces from the public gaze. Thus are you free, while we? We are slaves in captivity, and it breaks my heart to think that our children—my little Sushi—will feel the hard-

ship of it after a childhood as free as the birds. Like her brothers, she runs and plays in the sunlight. But when she develops and time presses, she too will be given to her man and confined like us in courtyards with high walls, and behind doors with narrow slats through which to peep at the world that the great God made for all alike. *Ai Khoda!* that this custom should so oppress a nation!"

"Just hear her talk!" said an old woman who was industriously chewing pan. "Like this she raves to us. Of what use to complain? Can any alter the decrees of fate? For generations have women been the chattel of men. We marry and bear children. For that were we created—animals of a higher order, to bring forth of our kind that the world may continue. For that reason are the girls given in marriage so young—so that, peradventure, no child should be unborn that fate decrees shall inhabit the earth. Who are we to say, 'Give us change!' 'Let us go free!' What we have been born to, we must continue. Each nation according to its custom and creed. In the bazaar they tell of the English who refuse to bear children! *Ai, Khoda!* They have made themselves as wise as the gods to prevent issue! On them, say I, will fall the wrath of the Almighty One. Surely *Khoda* will punish such wantonness! for what are we without our children? What is life if children cease to gladden us with their voices? Shame! Be content, accept the fate to which you are born, and happiness will be yours."

Mousie could have preached an edifying sermon on the subject the old dame had opened, but it was growing late and she rose to leave.

"Come again," said the Mother of Sushi. "Your visit has done me so much good. Through you, I glimpse the outside world."

"I will come again and bring magazines and

papers," said Mousie, "and shall have a great deal to tell you, every time."

"That will be a great pleasure for us to look forward to!" was the reply which the rest of the women endorsed.

Mousie returned to Gareth at the gate, having thoroughly enjoyed her outing, which she repeated at various times in the weeks that followed, and which, by degrees, emboldened her to make friends with many other Indian ladies who were also strictly "*pardar.*" It added a new interest to her days at Gungaserai and, incidentally, gave her a better knowledge of the conditions under which respectable Indian women lived, and a wider sympathy for their aspirations.

Gareth, also, was glad that she should make herself popular with the families of the Indian officials, for it created a better mutual understanding between the two separate nationalities.

The river was another source of recreation to Gareth and his wife.

Mousie loved to watch the white sails of fishing boats dotting its surface in the golden sunlight, and to hear the rush of the swirling current so reminiscent of the seaside at home. From the verandah of the bungalow, it looked but a stone's throw away—the great Mother Ganges flowing on her eternal course, and bearing on her bosom the faithful dead to their blessed Nirvana.

Sometimes, she witnessed a Hindu burial. Once, it was the body of a babe which its weeping parents placed on a raft constructed of plantain trees, and, with it, the earthen toys it had played with in life, together with a vessel containing milk on which it would find sustenance when it awoke in its other state.

A certain ghastly episode, Mousie will never forget as long as she lives. It occurred shortly after

she arrived at Gungaserai, and the shock made her, for awhile, dread the mighty river and its perils.

She was walking along the top of the bank with the dogs, when she saw a youthful shepherd bring his sheep down to the river to be washed before shearing. They were a flock of stupid creatures that herded together bleating vociferously but making no effort to escape. Mousie watched them standing up to their hocks in the shallow water gazing foolishly at each other as though wondering, what next? while the semi-nude shepherd scrubbed each in turn.

Suddenly, the surface of the water close at hand was disturbed violently, as an alligator's head and shoulders appeared, the sight of it paralysing shepherd and flock. With a swift movement, it snatched one of the sheep from the outskirts of the flock, and was about to dive with it, when the shepherd, giving himself no time to consider the dangerousness and futility of his act while thinking only of saving the property of his master, dashed after the monster and struck it repeatedly on its scaly body.

Mousie was petrified with horror, unable to move or speak, while the dogs barked in a frenzy of fright. She then saw the alligator drop the sheep, seize the shepherd by the waist and disappear with him under water.

What happened afterwards, was unforgettably tragic. Mousie found her voice and shrieked for help, bringing to the spot the workers in a field near by, who became witnesses, with her, of the youth's death by torture. The alligator appeared with him farther out in the stream, still holding him in its great jaws, while he struggled violently yelling to be saved. But there was no help possible. The water, churned about the spot, was dyed crimson till, finally, the unfortunate shepherd was dragged below and carried away to be devoured on some sandbank further down the river.*

* An incident taken from the Author's own experience.

Mousie ran home demented with shock. She cried inconsolably, wringing her hands with pity and grief. To think that there had been no help for the poor lad! What must his feelings have been when he found himself held in that iron grip! How he must have repented his impulse to save "only a sheep"! The bearer having heard the story from her lips, sighed, and shook his head. "It was kismet!" said he, "or what-for did he give his life for only a sheep?"

"He was too brave!" cried Mousie. "He did it courageously, without fear for himself."

"He would have had plenty of fear if he had waited to think, *huzur*," said the man. "We do brave acts and win praise, through an impulse. If he had time to think, he would have known that alligators eat men as well as sheep and have no fear of a stick when hungry."

"Oh, I wish I had not seen it! I shall never, never forget the horror of it!"

"We feel most when, with our own eyes, we have witnessed suffering and death. It is never the same when we are told. Shall I call the *Sahib, huzur?*"

"No, no!——" said Mousie, trembling from head to foot. "I will be calm presently."

"The Memsahib has a very tender heart for the troubles of others."

Gareth sympathised with her when he heard the story which was revolting, but was not so pitiful as he had not been an eye witness of the episode. "You think he showed courage, but it was only an act of rank stupidity. These uneducated coolies do foolhardy things from inability to think rapidly. The boy acted automatically. His impulse was to recover what was being snatched from him, and only when the alligator's jaws closed on him did he realise that he was a fool."

CHAPTER XI

THE ENGINEER

It was a rough drive by car to Talbegan over flat and uninteresting country mainly given up to the cultivation of paddy. Date palms and mango trees, bamboo groves and squalid villages, where the huts were of mud and thatch, were passed on the way, along a country road not too comfortable for motor traffic. Eventually, Gareth located Talbegan by its factories, and was directed by a rural post office clerk in a loincloth, to the engineer's bungalow at the corner of a straggling Mohammedan bazaar.

Gareth had been prepared to find his old friend living like an anchorite, as he was a scientific enthusiast who paid little or no attention to the comforts of life, but he did not expect a bungalow almost devoid of furniture, a native charpoy for a bedstead, a carpetless floor, and neglected surroundings. When he had first met and liked Bob Oathwait, the latter was as fond of refined conditions as any well-born *sahib* in India, and could give as good a dinner to his friends as Gareth himself. How he could endure the slovenliness of his home and surroundings at Talbegan, was incomprehensible, especially in a climate like Bengal. Common decency required that a man in his position should have more self-respect. What could have made him so indifferent?

Gareth gazed about him disgustedly. A dirty and carelessly dressed manservant set a chair for him in the verandah. It was of cane and rickety, with a camp table beside it, on which the same man, presently, placed a tray with a decanter of whisky and

a couple of glasses. The tray had a soiled tray cloth with frayed edges that distressed Gareth exceedingly.

"My *Sahib* is down by the riverside," said the man, "but he has been sent for. Meantime will *huzur* help himself?" There was a look in the servant's eye that offered information *gratis* if the visitor were curious, but receiving no encouragement, he retired, looking volumes of mystery.

Bob Oathwait came presently, as expected, and Gareth would not have known him. So terribly had he changed for the worse.

Still in his early thirties, he looked ten years older, was thin to emaciation with grey temples and stooping shoulders. It was a shock to the younger man to see such a falling away. Oathwait was unshaven and his clothes hung loose on his frame.

"Hullo, Bob!—I heard you were here and ran down from Gungaserai to look you up. How are you, old man?" said Gareth heartily, as he shook hands.

To say that his host was surprised, was to say little. He gasped, stepped back and surveyed Gareth with wide, glad eyes, then caught him round the shoulders. "By Gad! You are welcome! I did not know you had come to Gungaserai. Let's look at you." Again he surveyed his friend with affection. "You find me living in a hovel, camp fashion. It isn't worth while making the place decent when I am here to-day and gone to-morrow. This shanty belonged to one of the native contractors who had it cleaned out for me. What's your news? I heard a rumour that you were married. Good luck to you, old fellow. Better luck than I have had. Sit down and let us have a 'buck.'" Oathwait poured out generous whiskies and drank his almost neat, then replenished his glass.

While they talked, Gareth observed that his friend repeatedly filled his glass with double whiskies which

seemed to have no effect on his speech, though it loosened the hinges of his tongue and made him confidential to a certain extent.

"Yes, you see before you, Gareth, a disillusioned beggar. God knows why we fellows marry—with all apologies to your wife, who I trust is as different from mine as an angel is from Beelzebub. Mine has cut India for good, she says; and I might just as well be a bachelor, except that it takes me all I earn to keep her in comfort at home."

"Why do you do it?" asked Gareth with an angry gleam in his eyes.

"What can I do? I can't refuse to meet her bills, and they are the very devil! Would you advertise that you are not responsible for your wife's debts?—It's damned hard on a man that he should be made so in these times, when women have such a lot of freedom and are no longer the chattel they were when that law was made."

"My wife wouldn't make debts. Since we have been married, she has paid off most of mine."

"Go on your knees and thank Almighty God for her, Gareth. You are lucky beyond your deserts. I have had a hell of a life, and the least said soonest mended."

"Why don't you send for her, or cut off supplies?"

"I am not sure that I want her out. She loathes India, and with her around, I'd never have a moment's peace. 'What the eye doth not see, the heart doth not grieve at.' I worshipped the ground she trod on, *once;* but, by Gad, if I could only hear she had eloped, I'd rejoice and be 'exceeding glad.' But no such luck! M'lady is clever. She knows just how far to go. She won't, if she can help it, make her name mud, and is very careful to keep clear of the divorce court!"

"How can you tell what she's doing at this distance? Have you never put a detective on to her?"

"Detectives cost money, and I never have a *sou* to spend over my pay. In fact, I—I have been a bit of a fool lately and am now in a quandary." He took a long pull at his glass and leant back in his chair looking haggard and nervous.

"What's wrong?" Gareth asked, alarmed, for Oathwait's face twitched and his fingers looked palsied.

"A little while back, I had to cable home rather a large sum of money to my wife. She had been to Monte Carlo and lost her head, it seems, so that she hadn't a penny to live upon and was owing quite a lot to a man who was blackmailing her. Well, I had no option but to"—he dropped his voice to a whisper—"borrow Government money. I get big sums for contractors, and, by keeping them waiting, I have managed to get along for awhile, hoping to sell out my remaining coal shares. But, I'm dashed if I have any luck. They are not worth the paper they are written on in the present state of the market. You can fancy what I feel like. To borrow on ruinous interest from moneylenders, would just about finish me." Oathwait refilled his glass from the bottle after Gareth again refused to drink.

"What are you going to do?"

"God knows! Put a bullet through my brains."

Gareth could not help contrasting the broken-down fellow before him with the man he knew a few years ago, before he met Miss Arden and married her for her pretty face. How weak he had been with his unconscionable wife!

"I can't make it out. Why on earth couldn't you have taken a high hand with her?" said he.

Oathwait brooded awhile. "Simply, I couldn't. I suppose I was a fool about her. I cannot even now, though I know she doesn't care a hoot for me and is just bleeding me white. I don't believe you would have done any better. You would have given her her head like I have done, and wished to God

you were dead. If she'd only do a flit with another fellow! But she likes respectability too well to throw up society for love. I can't see her in the divorce court, disgraced and cut by her friends. Not she! She is too 'fly' and is probably having things both ways; but I shall never know it."

Gareth stayed to lunch and left in the afternoon to return to Gungaserai after making Oathwait promise to spend the following week-end with him and Mousie.

"I feel dreadfully worried about you, Bob. You seem to be letting go, rather. And what about that borrowed money?" he said, before leaving.

Oathwait looked nervous and frightened. "I would get the sack if it were found out, and how long I can keep those johnnies waiting for their money I don't know. Some of them are cutting up rough already. God! this is what marriage has done for me!"

"We must see what can be done about it. I will have to consult my wife. I never do anything without consulting her, for her brain is the better balanced of the two."

"I congratulate you, old man. It is good to hear of a happy marriage once in the way. One doesn't meet with them too often to be optimistic. But what can you do for me? I haven't the face to borrow a big sum of money from you, now that you have obligations of your own."

"I don't know!—how much is it?"

Oathwait named the sum, which ran into a few thousand rupees, and Gareth blew a low whistle. It was ghastly trouble for poor old Bob, who would certainly lose his billet and prospects of a pension in later life, if his chief had any inkling of what he had done. Bob Oathwait had no prospects beyond his monthly pay. No rich relatives to apply to in time of need; and neither had his wife any money.

"I'll talk to my wife," said Gareth, after which he said good-bye and drove home.

In the meantime, Mousie had spent an interesting day with Peter Riley, who did his best to make a good impression on her. As he was a rather handy and resourceful person, he helped her with ideas for a new chicken run she was making at the back of the bungalow with a local carpenter on the job, and tuned the piano which was flat in the treble. As a reward, Mousie played for him and sang the old songs she loved and had practised since Gareth had given her a piano. Though her voice was "rusty" for want of practice, it was true and sweet, and her playing accurate and sympathetic, so that the morning passed pleasantly. They lunched well, Riley saying that it did his heart good to sit down to a decently-served meal in company with a lady again.

Mousie often caught his eyes appraising her appearance, a glint of admiration in them which made her flush involuntarily, for she was not used to flattery, spoken or unspoken. Gareth had sometimes raised her to heaven by saying she had a wonderful figure which most women might envy. And he had sometimes told her that her face was very sweet. If it was true, she did not owe her looks to accuracy of features. Peter Riley confessed himself a "lonely devil," greatly appreciative of her kindness in allowing him to bask in her presence and drink his fill of "goodness and courage."

"I take off my hat to you, Mrs. Wynstay," said he. "You are one of the bravest and best. I shall always think of you as an example to wives. Your husband is a lucky man."

After luncheon and the cheering effect of bottled Bass, he wanted to grow confidential. Did Mrs. Wynstay conceive what a humanising effect it was on a lonely devil like himself, to be allowed to spend a day in her gracious society? It was nothing to her, but to him it was just a breath of "home"!

"I am very sorry that you should have to live all alone," said she. "Couldn't your wife try to like India—I mean, give the life another trial?"

"My wife is like many other young married women—too full of herself, Mrs. Wynstay. She finds life in the rural districts of India too dull, and takes the excuse of the children to live at home instead of here with me. The influences are 'too baneful' for them, the 'climate unsuitable'—a thousand reasons are discovered to make it necessary for her to clear out, and some more to make it obligatory to be with them, rather than return to her husband. First, the difficulty of finding the right people to leave them with. The grandparents are 'too old' and have 'no sympathy with childhood'—strangers are 'not to be trusted'—schools are out of the question till the children are older, so she lives at home and has a topping time while a nurse looks after them at the seaside. Not very long ago, she was at a house party in Scotland. I don't call that having true maternal instincts, leaving the kids with hirelings and gadding about."

"Why shouldn't the children be with her?"

Peter Riley laughed maliciously. "I dare say they would be very much in her way. Besides, a nurse might give her away!"

"How terrible when a man can talk like that of his wife!"

"Isn't it? But don't blame me. I am fed up. I don't know anything at this distance of her doings, except what she chooses to write about in her letters."

"I feel so sorry when I hear of marriages turning out like this."

"Naturally. It doesn't help one to respect the 'holy estate.' We started all right till the loneliness got on her nerves and then child-bearing. It was her idea that there should be no children for the first few years; pure selfishness and funk. She dreaded the ordeal and was hysterical and unreason-

able when she discovered she was in for it. I stood a good deal, but the last time just killed all feeling I had for her. A fellow doesn't marry to go through all that—besides, when there is property, a wife has a very decided duty to perform. Personally, I see no reason why women should make such bones about child-bearing when they have the means to meet all expenses of care and education. In these modern times they don't even have to suffer too much. When one looks around and sees the huge families of simple bazaar folk in India, you lose sympathy for the fuss that is made in our civilisation. Only sheer poverty should be the excuse for shirking one's almost national obligation in the matter of raising children. Unfortunately, the nation doesn't do much to help in the matter."

"Perhaps she would come out if—if there were to be no more children?" said Mousie, with embarrassment.

"It's too late. I am not sure I want her now, and she certainly hates Madhupara, and looks upon me as a selfish brute. The fact is, life here is too dull for her. She has nothing to do—servants do everything, and the idleness of the days and lack of society react on both of us. Very little pleases me, but she missed her friends and parties."

Another case like Bob Oathwait's! thought Mousie.

"I don't suppose I am the only disappointed husband in the East, that's the worst of it! Fellows don't marry as readily as they used to do. They think twice about it with the examples they have before them, and prefer to remain bachelors. Not many men have the luck to meet with a girl like you. 'Gareth' is to be congratulated."

"That is very flattering!" said Mousie. "It would be a sorry thing for the world if there were not quite a lot of women with a strong sense of duty, if not love, to make them good, loyal wives. I sup-

pose there are faults on both sides, and too little tolerance for weakness."

"Oh, I don't pretend that I have not been unsympathetic towards hysteria and 'nerves.' I have very little patience for tears and recriminations, and have a devil's temper when roused."

"And you loved each other, once?"

"We thought we did till we discovered it didn't wash. Once disillusioned, it isn't easy to care in the same way again. Oh, we had a hell of a time—if you'll excuse me!—and now are happiest apart, I won't deny it. Only it is rotten that our divorce laws will oblige two people to be tied together when all love and desire for intimacy are dead. She would be happier with a husband more after her own tastes whose business keeps him in England, and I—with someone like you"—he paused, his eyes dwelling broodingly on hers—"someone sweet and true; whose voice is like music, whose tenderness is divine, whose nature is a blend of wife and mother, and who seems to understand the spirit of those words—'And they twain shall be one flesh.' Again I say—'lucky Gareth!'"

Mousie gasped. Never had anyone said such things to her before! "I don't like it when you are personal," said she, flushing uncomfortably.

"I haven't said anything personal. I have not called you ravishingly beautiful——"

"Because you couldn't. I am nothing of the sort!" indignantly.

"No? What does a girl of your type realise about herself? You are too busy thinking of others to know that you are beautiful in all that matters. The man you love and who doesn't yet appreciate you to your full value—(one can tell that in a moment)—will yet learn to worship you. You grow on one with extraordinary subtlety. Your friends are friends for life. I can see myself spending every available moment on this side of the river for the

comfort of hearing you speak and watching you, busy."

Mousie did not know what to make of him. Whether to be angry or flattered, and succeeded in feeling very uncomfortable. She distrusted Peter Riley, and was sure, with a little encouragement, that he would be difficult to repress.

The whole thing was, she told herself as his excuse, that he was very lonely and idle, and having had no ladies as neighbours for years, he was in danger of losing his head now that he was alone with someone young and not wholly unattractive. The look in his eyes made her nervous. He was evidently ready for an intrigue if only she were of the same mind, and he was feeling his way with her. She would have to leave him in no doubt at all of her character and inclinations.

"I am sure Gareth and I will always be glad to cheer you," she said with a calmness she was far from feeling. "I should be very grateful for your good opinion, but think you should have waited before you expressed it. You might be quite wrong, you know, and sorry you spoke! It isn't safe to jump at conclusions concerning husbands and wives who are not given to demonstrativeness in public. What right have you to say that Gareth doesn't appreciate his wife?"

"I shouldn't have said it, and apologise."

"You shouldn't have *thought* it!"

"We can't help impressions. But I shall not offend again."

Mousie was glad and relieved when Gareth drove in at that moment, for it put an end to the argument, and shortly afterwards, as it was growing dark, Peter Riley took his leave.

"I've a long way to go and the moon isn't at its full," said he, shaking hands with husband and wife.

"Thanks awfully for keeping my wife company and looking after her," said Gareth, innocently.

CHAPTER XII

COMPARISONS ARE ODIOUS

It was quite like old times to Mousie to take cross-country walks with dogs disporting themselves at her feet, balancing herself on the top of narrow dykes and making friends with the women working in the fields. As she could speak the language serviceably, she could interest herself in the families of peasantry and in the bazaar folk; and, in turn, awaken their interest in herself. Naked children followed her for what her pockets held of things good to eat, for up to a certain age, children are not bound by obligations of caste. Sometimes, she was useful with first-aid when a child met with an accident in its play, till it became a common practice for women, old and young, to gather with their children below the verandah for help and advice. Self-interest often governed their appreciation of the privilege, for the "hakim" was a power in the land, and it was expedient to gain the favour of a possible mediator.

Gareth rarely accompanied his wife on her "constitutionals," but was ready on a Sunday morning for a game of golf with her on the course they had jointly laid out with the aid of an army of coolies. On their round, like two good pals, they would discuss "shop," or debatable points in Gareth's civil cases; or argue over his magisterial judgments. All highly useful to him, but he was never informed of the latest difficulties of domestic economy in relation to the rise and fall of prices, failure of transport

on which food supplies depended, or asked for advice as to the management of the household staff. These were her own problems which her mother's experience had taught her were best tackled single-handed, for nothing was so irritating to a husband's nerves when he returned after a long day's work that taxed his powers of administration, to have to deal with the petty worries of domestic life, as for instance—"My dear, I shall really have to get rid of the *gwallor*. This is the second time he has watered the milk. And really, it is too much of a good thing! I am positive that the *masalchi* is stealing the eggs. There should have been at least six eggs in the fowlhouse this morning, and he brought me only two! As for the cook! he was so impudent to me when I refused to pay his exorbitant charge for potatoes! If he is going to cheat because the marketing is in his hands, I will have to get someone else. Do you think I could send Hari Komar to do the marketing? He seems honest, even if he is of low caste. Oh, dear, oh, dear! troubles never come singly! I forgot to write to Calcutta in time for a larger supply of ice and Sunday coming between, we will never last out the week! Do you think you could wire from the railway station on your way to the *kachari?*"—and so forth and so on. So long as Mousie felt she could deal with her own department, unaided, she was determined not to make the common mistake of young housekeepers and spoil her intercourse with her husband by carrying to him the petty worries of her daily affairs.

Gareth informed Mousie on his return from Talbegan, that Bob Oathwait would spend the following week-end with them. "You will be sorry to hear that I found him in a bad way. Drinks too hard and is utterly fed up with his life. When I think of what a fine fellow he was—a real sportsman and full of beans, it hurts like the devil to see him now, gaunt, nervy and miserable. I fear he's fast going

downhill, and unless he can control his wife's selfish extravagances, he'll end in gaol."

"Oh, Garry! Can't you do anything?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about." And he told her all he had learned respecting Mrs. Oathwait's behaviour and the shocking trouble she had brought on her husband. "He could not only be sacked on the spot from Government and his career ruined, but landed in gaol for 'misappropriation.'"

"Oh, how terrible! Was she dreaming or a fool to have made him do such a thing?" cried Mousie.

"I don't suppose it occurred to her how and from where he gets the money she demands. Anyhow, he's in a fix and I—I am afraid we must try to pull him out. Only I did not like promising anything without telling you."

"How wicked she is! not only to leave him alone for so long while she's enjoying herself, but to spend more than he is earning! It is worse than Peter Riley's case. He, at least, knows how to limit his wife's extravagances. I can't see him taking the coat off his back to cover her."

"They are two different characters. I guess Riley is in a good measure responsible for his wife's refusing to live out here, while Bob could not help the conditions which drove Mrs. Oathwait from India. As an engineer, he was posted to ghastly districts, where it was often impossible to house a lady. Riley has a comfortable home, and his wife used to spend her summers in the hills, I believe. He is not cut out for give and take, and I dare say was rather of a bully. Bob was never that. He was madly in love with his wife and gave in to her every whim till she did what she liked all down the line. He's a good fellow, Bob,—but I wouldn't go bail for the other devil."

"I daresay there are faults on both sides, as also in the case of the Rileys," and Mousie told him all she had heard of Peter Riley's woes.

"It seems to me that marriage in India is a great gamble and not many get the prizes," said Gareth. "It makes me very thankful for my little mouse," and he placed an arm about her shoulders.

"She happens to have her heart in her job," said Mousie.

"Thank heaven for that!" and Gareth released her after kissing her on the cheek.

Mousie wished he had held her closer and longer, and that he had felt moved to kiss her many times instead of that once on her cheek! It was very sweet when he smiled at her and said kind things; but, her heart was sick for something warmer and stronger as a demonstration of feeling. Her awakening womanhood yearned for passionate love as a thirsty soul for water; but her desires had to be sternly repressed, for she had known when she married, that her husband had already given of his best to another and that it would take years for him to care in that way again. So Mousie hid her disappointment, too proud to let Gareth know how she hungered for greater fervour, and seething emotions that made all the differenec to a lover's embrace.

"I told Bob," Gareth went on, "that I would see what could be done for him, but I am very much afraid that matters won't end there, if we do pull him out of his quagmire. She's bleeding him white."

"He will have to be stern with her," said Mousie.

"I hinted as much. The trouble with us is, that we aren't rich enough to be able to afford such a big sum as a loan—or gift, which it will amount to, in the end. There isn't much left after my furlough and setting up house again."

"If you hadn't me to think of, would you lend the money?"

"Without hesitation. A fellow has to deprive himself if he is required to help a friend in trouble, but when there is a wife——"

"What would the loss of so much money mean to you and me?"

"A good deal. We would not be able to take a holiday at Christmas, for one thing, and it will be running things fine when you have to go to the hills next summer."

"Is that all? And against that . . . ? A friend disgraced, his career broken, his life ruined!" Mousie was silent, her eyes fastened on the darkening horizon across the expanse of the wide Ganges. "We haven't any choice, Garry. I could not take my pleasure at such a cost."

"We aren't bound to strip ourselves that others should be clothed," said Gareth, watching her earnestly.

"That's just it. We aren't having to do that. We are only asked to deny ourselves a little; to put up with a few extra inconveniences. I, personally, would like to spend Christmas at home, if it is all the same to you; and I shall not mind if I don't go to the hills next summer."

"Most wives do. It isn't any good to stay in the plains when the temperature is a hundred and anything in the shade, and get ill."

"I would stick it out just as well as you. Remember that I used to bear it when Daddy was in India. We never could afford those annual trips to Darjeeling, so got acclimatised the best way we could. Besides, I don't believe you could get along without me to keep things going and the servants up to the mark. The house would be in a dreadful way, and you, terribly neglected! So that's out of the question."

Gareth smiled affectionately and patted her hand. "I always knew you were a sport, Mousie. You are spoiling me, terribly. Of course, I should be hopelessly rattled without you, old thing."

"Men are like babies," said Mousie in her motherly way, "and have to be nursed by their

womenfolk, or they would be getting into all sorts of difficulties."

"It hasn't been poor Bob's experience."

"No. It is an eternal wonder to me that women can be so short-sighted as to wreck their own home lives as some do!" To prove how happy she was, Mousie slipped her hand into Gareth's on his knee and thrilled as his fingers closed appreciatively on it. It was the extent of voluntary love-making from her, for her instinctive tact made her aware that demonstrations of love, unsought, only wearied the recipient. When Gareth was in an affectionate mood, he never found her unresponsive. There were times when gratitude and admiration for her wifely qualities, or the human need within him of love, drove him, full of tenderness and caresses, to seek it of his wife, and then she was all he wanted her to be.

There were times, also, when Mousie's human need of love, ungratified, left her very vulnerable to the pin-pricks of domestic life, and tried her temper sorely. It was very difficult, then, to remember the value of patience and self-control, and to preserve a golden silence when it was so easy to sulk and grouse. However, she discovered that a few "damns!" were immensely relieving to her feelings; and a judicious avoidance of her beloved Gareth till her mental equilibrium was restored, was the soundest policy of all. Thus she maintained her tactful sway.

The matter of the loan was definitely settled, and Gareth mentally doffed his hat to Mousie for her supreme unselfishness. How many wives would have cared to do so much for a stranger and the friend of her husband? He could not name one.

In the matter of his dogs, too, he had reason to be grateful. While on furlough, he had left his pets with friends, who, on his return to India, gladly relinquished the responsibility and returned them to him, with the result that the bungalow at Gunga-

serai was overrun by mongrels whose devotion to their master was their only justification for existence. Mousie was fond of all animals, but was often exasperated by the invasions from which she and the house suffered. Muddy paws on the carpets and bones buried under sofa cushions gave her moments of real torture, for she had different ideas on the subject of canine discipline. Yet she bore with the exuberant creatures because, in Gareth's eyes, they could do no wrong. He loved them and indulged them to the utmost limit of his wife's endurance.

One day, during that week, Peter Riley dropped in, again, with the flimsy excuse of an invitation to Gareth and his wife to spend a week-end at his place, and finding Mousie greatly distracted by the boisterous ill-manners of Gareth's dogs, he expressed his annoyance openly.

"Why don't you whip them? They will soon learn obedience," he growled. "Dogs are the better for being kept in their proper place."

"Whip them?" Mousie was shocked. Nobody ever raised a hand to her husband's pets. "I couldn't. Their feelings would be terribly hurt. They are accustomed to being indulged and loved, and they would wonder what had come over me! Besides, Gareth wouldn't like it."

"Yet they are annoying you exceedingly?"

"One has to make allowances for dog psychology, especially when they love us so."

"A pack of spoilt brutes! One would think that your husband set greater store by their feelings than yours!"

"Do you think that remark is in good taste?" she asked, lifting grave eyes to his.

"I humbly beg your pardon. The truth is, I am ready to fly out when I see—things that annoy you. I like dogs, but I hate to see them spoilt."

"Lots of human beings are spoilt by those that love them, why not dogs?"

"Can you make the comparison?"

"I can, and agree with Gareth that there is *no* comparison."

"Meaning?"

"That dogs are infinitely superior to some human beings in character. Many of us would benefit by the example of faithfulness, devotion, and forgiveness of spirit, set by dogs."

Peter Riley laughed. "You're the most loyal wife I know. You are holding a brief for the dogs just because they belong to your husband. You hate their mess, yet you snub me for criticising them, though I am sympathising with you!"

Mousie smiled. "It doesn't do anyone harm to practise tolerance. 'Live and let live,' can even apply to animals. If Gareth is happy in spoiling his dogs, and they are happiest undisciplined, I must be content to adapt myself to circumstances and be happy too. There is nothing so good for the soul as tolerance."

"You have a wonderful philosophy!" said Riley, with the look she hated most in his keen, appraising eyes. "What a wife you are for a man!"

"If you are wanting to see my husband," interrupted Mousie, "you will find him at the *kacharis*, and while you are there, I'll get on with my housekeeping."

"I came mainly to ask you and your husband for a week-end. Choose your time and I'll arrange the matter of transport. My motor boat is at your disposal."

"I should love it," said Mousie conventionally. "But you had better see Gareth."

"He is sure to say that he leaves it to you."

"He might. But it will be best if you see him."

"All right—since you wish to be rid of me!" looking offended.

"I am sorry to appear inhospitable, but I am very

busy. I shall be pleased if you care to come back to afternoon tea."

"Thank you. I suppose I should be thankful for small mercies."

"They are very small indeed, for I have no cake and the bread and butter are very stale. I am thinking of baking our own bread. Have you a recipe?"

"I have, and it will give us something to do if you will come over and experiment at my place. I have a splendid oil stove that will bake anything."

"Thank you. I believe in being busy."

"I am frightfully idle since I gave up manufacturing indigo. My estate is now in the hands of tenants who cultivate the soil and, incidentally, give me my income and plenty of leisure. A striking example of living and letting others live," said he, provokingly.

"Then you really do nothing?"

"Nothing great. My accounts are kept by a *babu*, my rents are collected by a special staff. I pay wages, sign documents, keep an eye on my boundaries lest my neighbour, Gopal Chunder Prasad, pinches land, and write an occasional letter to the lady who is known as my wife. The rest of the time I sit back in an easy chair ruminating on the disappointments and disillusionments of life, and cursing my luck that the river and umpteen miles of sand keep me from being a daily visitor at Gungaserai."

"I shouldn't think Gungaserai had much attraction for you."

"To what better use could I put my leisure than the privilege of learning from you how to be forebearing and tolerant, even to mongrel curs?"

"Unfortunately, I am too busy this morning to interview would-be pupils," said Mousie, laughing to soften her snub, and feeling that Peter Riley, rather than Gareth's dogs, needed keeping in his proper place.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INVITATION

Bob Oathwait made himself slightly more presentable and kept his engagement to visit his old friend Gareth Wynstay, for Gareth was married, and it felt, to the lonely fellow, like going into society again. It was an unpleasant ordeal for the man who had long avoided ladies and lost every interest in social life; but he was in a tight corner, and if Gareth was going to do anything for him, he must, out of sheer gratitude, meet Mrs. Wynstay like a civilised gentleman, which he feared he had long ceased to be. But his clothes hung on his shoulders and his face looked lined and gaunt, and twitching nerves gave away the fact that he was habituated to alcoholic stimulant and was in torment at being obliged to exercise self-restraint.

"He drinks hard," Gareth had told Mousie to prepare her for Bob's looks. "If he had only been more abstemious he might now have been high up in his department, but, from what people let drop"—(he referred to information volunteered in correspondence with mutual friends)—"he is his own enemy. He has gone to pieces over his domestic troubles, and, left to himself, is fast going downhill."

Mousie was deeply affected by the story of Bob Oathwait's failure which people laid at his wife's door. He used, from all accounts, to be a fine fellow, full of the joy of life and the ambition to

succeed. He had been even marked by his seniors as a "coming man" in the Public Works Department of the Government of Bengal; but to look at him now, it was heart-breaking. Mousie was sure that a good wife, if she had loved him, would have helped him to succeed, not spoilt his life through disappointment and disillusionment. What had been the trouble between them? It seemed that she was pretty and vain without resources in herself. Reared to think only of herself and get the most out of life in the way of pleasure, she had found the loneliness of the *mafasil* with only her husband's companionship to satisfy her craving for life and adventure, intolerable. The great silences of wild places unnerved her, and being without definite occupation, she grew restless, discontented, and full of self-pity. It was no life for one of her youth and upbringing, she had told her husband. He was cruel to expect her to settle down in the midst of desolation with nothing to do but to think of all she was missing. Soon, she would be old and past caring—better if she had died! Men had no right to marry and bring their wives to *this!* and so on.

When the weather grew warm, Oathwait was glad to send her to the hills for diversion, hoping it would make up for certain deprivations at other seasons of the year. But admiration and sympathy had spoiled her for any other life than a round of gaiety. A sojourn in a hill station is like a prolonged gymkhana, so that she never again submitted to life in camp with her husband. She was afraid of everything in camp—sickness, snakes, the natives; and Bob had to consent to her renting a house in Calcutta where he could visit her occasionally. In time, he grew to dread those visits, feeling them unwelcome, for they interrupted the engagements she had made, and he gained nothing but poor satisfaction. Eventually, when a child was to be born, he was maddened by jealousy, and caused a terrible scene.

It was the end! They never spoke to each other again, and when she recovered from her confinement, he sent her home.

He confessed all this to Gareth over whisky and cigars at bedtime, and Gareth repeated it to Mousie, whose heart melted with pity for the unhappy husband.

The end of the quarrel was that he had been supporting a wife and kid in England for four years, as the line of least resistance. It had been his pride to "heap coals of fire" on her head by acting with magnanimity and unselfishness towards her, but it seemed that her demands were insatiable. Like the "daughters of the horse leech," it was always "give—give!" till he had nothing to give but his life, and that would have to be sacrificed if he could see no way out of the bog into which matrimony had landed him.

"Poor devil!" said Gareth. "I wonder if it is too late to regenerate him? See him at Talbegan, engaged upon that stupendous task of diverting the currents of the Ganges! And his mind, instead of concentrating on the job, is torn between desire for whisky and dread of losing his good name, just because he was driven by his wife's extravagance to do such a suicidal thing as to borrow from Government funds! It is ghastly."

Mousie felt so deeply for the unhappy fellow and his imminent danger of arrest and disgrace, that she made an opportunity for a long, sisterly talk with him. In her human shortsightedness, she offered advice blindly—wise, sound advice; but it is not always that good advice achieves its aim. Wisdom may be an attribute of the gods, but the devil is always ready to confound the wise.

"I see nothing for it," said Mousie to Bob Oathwait, as they smoked in the shade of the cool verandah and sub-consciously watched the gulls flashing their wings in the sunlight above the rippling

Ganges, "*nothing at all,* but to get her out again."

"What should I do with her out here?" cried Oathwait in consternation. "I sold all my furniture and kept only camp things. I gave up all thought of ever having her to live with me again—and, I am not sure I would care to repeat the experiment, even if I had a furnished bungalow for her. It is difficult to believe that I was mad about her once. It only shows how one's feelings can change. I thought her so beautiful, but, believe me, Mrs. Wynstay, before we parted, her face was hateful in spite of its beauty. I could only see hatefulness in her eyes, and malice in the shape of her mouth. And I was such a romantic fellow!—so full of ideals and respect for the married state! But for you and Gareth, I'd say it was very much over-rated. Your case shows that marriage can be a success if undertaken in the right spirit. But how many women—men, too, know what they are about, or pay attention to their marriage vows? They marry for an infatuation, or expediency. It doesn't matter a jot if temperaments are not suitable, or love is not mutual. Generally it is one side that cares more than the other, in which case, the time inevitably comes when a third party barges in, and then—it's finished!"

Mousie winced, for the love between Gareth and herself was one-sided. For that reason she had been glad of Gungaserai and the peace to her mind at having no rival to provoke a comparison and take him from her. The least hint of another woman coming between herself and her happiness, paralysed her heart with dread. Only now was she awakening to the knowledge of her own nature and its capabilities of suffering through jealousy. But it must never be encouraged, she warned herself, or life would be a miserable business. She was determined never to allow herself to be jealous of Gareth, for he had no desire for the society of any other woman than his wife. His one, big love story and subsequent dis-

illusionment had made him safe for the rest of his life.

However, it was not of herself she was thinking at this moment, but of what was best for the unfortunate husband before her. While Gareth interviewed a deputation from a distant village on the subject of an unpopular Inspector of Police, she gave Bob Oathwait the benefit of her wisdom.

"My idea is, that it is time your wife was brought to a sense of her obligations. Where is the child?"

"With nurses at a Baby College. She has no near relatives in England and is only too glad of the chance to have the kid with qualified people she can trust. My people have never seen the child, as they don't approve of my wife and she can't get on with them." He shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "I don't care, any way, and feel it is just as well they are not troubled."

"Let her leave the child where it is and come out. Make her understand how you are placed. It is time you did so. Put a clear statement of the truth before her and say how very nearly you were in serious trouble on her account but for Gareth. It won't do her any harm to know that she is under an obligation to strangers. It will prompt her to see that your debt is paid. And, only by her coming out and making up her mind to share your difficulties, can it be done. Not as long as she persists in enjoying herself at home at your expense. Hide nothing from her—not even what she will have to expect till you are cleared of your burden, which is the result of her folly and extravagance. She will respect you if you are determined, and tell her definitely that remittances will cease from a certain date, if she refuses to accept the passage ticket and allowance for the voyage."

"I wonder what she will do if I write all that? She'll guess it isn't my doing; that someone is at

the back of me! I have been very weak with her all along."

"Act differently now. Let her see that 'the worm has turned,' if you'll excuse the quotation! I am sure it will result in her coming out and behaving considerately, or leaving you for good with some other man; in which case, it will be a 'good riddance'!"

"You think I should have her at *Talbegan?*—it is impossible! The bungalow is a shanty and poorly furnished—only chairs and a table. I haven't even a decent bed! and the cost of furnishing a 'home' is quite beyond me. I haven't the money."

"How would it be if she came, at first, to us? She would be our guest and you will have no expense at all, so that you will be able to spare something every month towards furnishing. Meantime, you could come to us for week-ends, and try again to patch up all your differences."

"That would never work—but what an angel of mercy you are, Mrs. Wynstay! For one thing, I should just love to let my wife see for herself how delightfully you manage in this God-forsaken spot, and what a home you have made for your husband. It will be a real, moral lesson for her."

"She has had her fling by now, and if there is any good in her at all, she will see her duty to you, and do it unflinchingly. It is time she made up for the mischief she has done in the past."

The extent of that mischief was as yet unknown to either of the innocent plotters.

"Will you also write to her?" Bob asked, pleadingly. "Your invitation might carry weight. I have never mentioned a word to her of my old friend being a sort of neighbour. In fact, I rarely write at all, or more than a few lines in reply, whenever it pleases her to write to me."

"Yes, I shall write if you wish it, and try to persuade her to come out."

So it was settled. Bob Oathwait left at the end of his visit looking a very different man, though his need for frequent stimulants was unabating. "An acquired habit," Gareth explained, "and one that will be frightfully hard to give up. It's like this. The whisky-habit is like the drug-habit, it lifts a fellow up, then drops him lower, which makes him return again and again for the necessary support, till he is soaked in alcohol—every organ affected. Then, in many cases, there follows disease and death. The pity of it is that he stands a lot without showing it. Half the quantity he consumes would give another fellow D.T.'s, and he'd have to ease up. But Bob never applies the brakes as his brain is never affected, only his organs and nervous system. I warned him straight out that he wouldn't last long if he did not go easy with the whisky, but he laughed, saying it was good for him; that he couldn't work if he dropped it."

"He looks a very sick man," said Mousie.

"I am sure no doctor would pass his life."

Mousie thought gravely over the letter she had promised to write Mrs. Oathwait, as it would have to be expressed with the utmost tact. In the end, she showed her effort to Gareth, and posted it after receiving his unqualified approval.

"It is very good of you to saddle yourself with her as a guest," said he. "Few women would be bothered with a girl like that. She has no conscience and is as selfish as hell. However, please yourself. If it brings her to her senses and makes her turn over a new leaf in her relations with her husband, you will have done a truly charitable act."

"Dear Mrs. Oathwait" (the letter ran),

"My husband and I are very anxious about your "husband's health, and we feel sure, were you to "know how poorly he looks and how much in need "of care, you would come out. You may have "heard that my husband and yours are old and

"tried friends, for which reason, Gareth has been "happy to help him in a recent difficulty. We feel "most sympathetic and would be glad if you care to "make use of us when you come—if you only will! "We shall both be delighted if you will be our "guest till Mr. Oathwait is able to make things "comfortable for you where he is for the present. "I know it will be hard for you to part with your "child, but life for Government officials and their "wives in India is made up of partings. If you "think it will be best to bring your little one with "you, Gareth and I will be only too pleased. Just "suit yourself. I believe children do well up to "five in this country. So there is yet time for you "to enjoy your precious baby before the climate "makes it imperative that he should go.

"Hoping you will lose no time in coming out, "lest your husband has a serious breakdown,

"Yours sincerely,

"ELIZABETH WYNSTAY."

Christmas came and went before Mousie had an answer to the letter by cable. In the meantime, however, the acquaintance between herself and Peter Riley made strides. She and Gareth spent the promised week-end at his place and were surprised to find how comfortably he was situated. Mousie could not understand why his wife had been unable to endure it, for the great brick house, with its pillared verandahs and cool, lofty interior, was like one of Calcutta's palaces. Peter Riley was true to his word when he produced a recipe for bread-making with plantain yeast, and Mousie had a delightful afternoon in his company, learning how to turn out loaves of bread. His head servant was accustomed to the business, as home-made cakes and bread were made daily at Madhupara. Mousie, therefore, acquired new accomplishments and was agreeably surprised to find that Peter Riley could be very charming, indeed. If he was rather persistently flattering, Mousie did not quarrel with him for that, as most

women, while deeming it proper to discourage flattery, accept it as truth and are inwardly gratified and thrilled to think that they are admired. To Mousie it was altogether a new experience, for in other days, when she was something between a domestic slave and a potential old maid, the boys passed her over for flappers and pretty faces, so that it was rather wonderful to learn, in subtle fashion, that there were things about her that men could admire and find attractive. It argued that she was interesting, or improving in appearance as people do when happy; and, best of all, that she might yet be beautiful in Gareth's sight. It is a notorious fact that most men enjoy seeing their wives admired by others of their sex, and accept it as a tribute to their own good taste; so Mousie lived in hopes that Gareth would profit by Peter Riley's evident appreciation of her and begin to regard her from a new angle of vision. If only he showed a tiny spark of jealousy, she felt that her efforts to impress him would be rewarded. But Gareth was never jealous. He showed his utter confidence in her by using his week-end at Madhupara as an opportunity for a complete rest and by allowing his wife perfect liberty to amuse herself with Peter. In fact, he was glad to see that Peter Riley had it in him to appreciate a girl like Mousie. As a rule, his type preferred flippancy and brainlessness to earnestness and common sense. Mousie, though not highly educated, talked intelligently on most topics in which she took a sympathetic interest; and her sense of humour made her excellent company. So Gareth felt he could safely trust his wife to hold her own and give Mr. Riley a wholesome respect for her character.

One little circumstance shocked Mousie while on that visit to Madhupara, and it occurred one afternoon when Peter Riley was called away to inspect a bit of his land that a neighbour, an Indian, had been encroaching upon.

She was taking a short cut to the fields alone, along the pathway that led past the servants' quarters, and was arrested by a sound of loud wailing. Just then, a woman ran out of a hut carrying a babe astride her hips, her face distorted with grief and rage. At sight of the lady, she stopped and made a movement as if to return, then changed her mind and stood her ground, giving Mousie time to observe her remarkable appearance and that of the child she carried. She was handsome and clear-skinned, with raven hair and large almond-shaped, black eyes; but her expression was marred by two deep vertical lines between her brows. She was frowning viciously at the intruder as though resenting her presence and yet fascinated and curious. The child was amazingly light-skinned for an Indian, with a pair of green-grey eyes of singular beauty. How like Peter Riley! was her first thought, and she was set wondering. Could it be possible that this woman was his mistress? She had been carefully hidden out of sight and would never have been seen by the visitor had she not taken this path through the premises.

"They tell me that his memsahib is returning," she cried to Mousie in Hindustani. "Is it the truth? or is it for your sake that he is sending me away?"

"Who are you?" asked Mousie, then remembered that she should never have asked such a question.

"What does it matter who I am! It is enough that this has been my home for years, and now I am being sent adrift with my child. I am not going! If he tries to make me, he will know that the she-cat has claws, and poison in her fangs. For myself—ah! what would it signify for there are big towns and I can still dance for gold. But this little one! *Khoda!*—let him attempt this cruelty, and beware!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Mousie gently. "Your going has nothing to do

with me. I am only here with my husband for a change of scene and rest."

She passed on with beating heart, very much afraid that she had surprised an unpleasant secret. When she told Gareth about it, he looked annoyed, and tried to change the subject.

"I wonder how the woman could have imagined that Mrs. Riley is expected?"

"Riley has not said anything to us, so I don't think it can be true. One excuse is as good as another if he is trying to get rid of the woman,—damn the fellow for not getting rid of her sooner!"

"But—Gareth—supposing he has been keeping her all this time, it isn't fair to send her away if that little child is his?"

"What do you suppose he can do under the circumstances?"

"He should have thought of that before he started to keep the woman. Surely his child has a claim on him?"

"If it is his—which I don't doubt since there is a resemblance—I am sure he'll do something for it and the mother. Any way, I shouldn't worry about them. It is no business of yours. I shouldn't like Riley to think we had been prying."

But Mousie's ready sympathies had been awakened and she could not dispose of such a human tragedy so airily. It seemed, the best of men had queer ideas on the subject of moral obligations when it came to a question of illicit love, or their duty towards the illegitimate offspring of the native women they had kept. She wondered if it would look like interference if she told Peter Riley the truth of her accidental discovery, and won his confidence? If she asked Gareth's advice on the subject, he would be scandalised and forbid her to mention it, so she decided that this was a case in which she should exercise her own judgment and act on her own initiative.

CHAPTER XIV

THE KID

MOUSIE'S opportunity to talk with Peter Riley on the subject that was troubling her, came that evening when he offered to show her the old factory, now in disuse, where indigo was manufactured as recently as in his boyhood. She readily accepted his escort, leaving Gareth reading the English papers, which interested him more than the ancient prosperity of Madhupara.

They strolled down to the ruins of vats and press houses, walked along parapets where the masonry was cracked and crumbling, peered into the recesses of store godowns where the woodwork was riddled by whiteants, keeping clear of suspicious piles of *débris* and weeds, out of a wholesome fear of snakes.

"We have quite a lot of deaths round about here from snake-bite," Peter told her, "for cobras and karaits abound. It is all right, however, if you are careful—look out!" He threw his arm about her and drew her swiftly to him, holding her close while he pointed to a movement in the grass. "You nearly stepped on one this minute. Think, if I hadn't stopped you!"

Mousie disengaged herself, a shudder passing through her, only to discover the next instant that it was a toad making its way through the grass. Surely, Peter Riley had seen it hop across the path?

"It's only a toad after all!—a much ado about nothing!" She laughed.

"Not about nothing—suppose it had been a snake?"

"Let us go back—besides, it is getting dark so quickly."

She wanted the leisure to speak to him about the woman, but did not know how to begin. At last, she made the plunge and, with eyes downcast, let him hear of her discovery, Peter keeping very silent till she had finished.

"I am very sorry, and I know I should not have ventured on any new path. But you must not think I was inquisitive. I was never more surprised in my life than when the woman came out and spoke to me. She seemed so upset and queer. Naturally, I, too, have felt upset; not at anything so much as at the fact that she was being sent away, a homeless outcast, with—that little child who—who——"

"Out with it!" as she hesitated. "Who——?"

"Who—has your eyes. He should not be left to drift into the bazaars and grow up a coolie when he has an Englishman's blood in his veins. I hope you don't mind my speaking? I wouldn't have dared, but the woman seemed to fear starvation for her child."

"I am glad you are broadminded enough to accept the truth of the situation without going off the deep end about it," said Peter Riley, pulling out a cigarette case. "Will you?—then may I?" as she shook her head. He lighted the cigarette and flung away the match before he continued, and Mousie gained the impression that he had done it to give himself time.

"I'll tell you everything, if I may, and then we'll look into the rights of the case," he went on. "Of course, you know that there are heaps of these illegitimate children all over the country, since the lower class of Indian woman is not particularly virtuous and Englishmen are kind masters. Some of them make faithful mistresses and play the game far better

than their European sisters. We fellows who have failed of success in matrimony find it a far safer plan to get a girl out of one of the villages for keeps than to leave things to luck. You are not so unsophisticated as to believe that grass widowers like myself, and men who are not thinking of getting married, are purists? We 'live and let live,' to quote your own phrase that has many adaptations. The only thing we don't do is to fall in love with these dusky damsels and, if we happen to be free, marry them. That would be the limit of folly. Nor can we be responsible for the progeny that are bound to arrive, since, to the native mind, children are gifts of Almighty God. They understand the position and are content to efface themselves together with their offspring, when the time comes for them to go; and, generally, there is no trouble, if the compensation is generous.

"This is not exactly news to you," he continued, flicking the ashes from his cigarette as they strolled along. "You have probably heard from your husband a good deal concerning our sins, or guessed all there is worth knowing; and are wise enough not to regard your men friends as celibates. It is your tolerance and sympathy I admire so much, and wish to God I had known you before."

"It is very frank of you to tell me all this," said Mousie, flushed and embarrassed, for his revelations sounded coarse and disagreeable. "I am not quite sure that it matters how much I know or do not. What troubles me is the thought of that child with a white man's blood in his veins, becoming a common coolie in an Indian bazaar. It is unspeakable. I think—if he is your son—there is a grave responsibility upon you, with respect to his future. After all—he is a part of you."

Peter's eyes twinkled, which showed that he was thoroughly intrigued with the conversation.

"There are probably many others, lost sight of,

or unknown to me. Am I to be held accountable for them all?"

"I think so."

"But—I haven't kept track of such happenings. Hitherto, I have looked upon them as 'natural phenomena.' As well expect me to turn Christian as to acknowledge myself the parent of illegitimate, half-caste kids. It isn't done in polite society!" (Mousie hated his laugh.) "What's good enough for their mothers is good enough for them, and they miss nothing, never having known any other life."

"As you confess you are not a Christian, your heartlessness and cruelty are explained," cried Mousie wrathfully. "No *true* Christian could think or speak like you. I could forgive a sinner who tried to retrieve the consequences of his sins, but there is something so cold-blooded and vicious in your philosophy, that—I have a contempt for your character. I am sorry to have met such a man."

Peter Riley looked thoroughly taken aback, and sneered—"You *can* hit out, by Jove!"

"Yes. I, too, claim the privilege of being frank."

He bowed sarcastically, his face like thunder, and in silence they made their way back to the house, Mousie wondering what Gareth would say to the "burst up." If she told him, he would be furious with Peter Riley for speaking as he had done, for Gareth was fastidious and refined in thought and speech. Mousie decided not to create worse trouble by relating the conversation, or to mention a word to him of her afternoon's experiences. She was capable of fighting her own battles, and need not encourage visits from the planter again, even if he recovered from the snub and wished to remain on friendly terms.

The rest of the evening passed quietly with nothing on the surface to attract Gareth's attention or rouse suspicion. Riley, alone, knew by her

impassiveness and avoidance of his eye, that he was judged and condemned.

When she reached her bedroom door, leaving Gareth to smoke in the distant drawing-room, Peter caught up with her, looking pale and passionate.

"I don't know what is going to happen if you persist in treating me like dirt!" he cried, chest heaving and breath short, as though he had run a race.

"What do you mean?" she questioned, startled, and wondering if he had been drinking, or if he were a little mad. As there was no evidence of the former, she was afraid that Peter Riley was going out of his mind.

"You are not going to turn your back on me as if I were something loathsome."

"It is your own fault if I have felt shocked and repelled," said she.

"Yet you are no prude. Can't you try to forget our conversation this evening?—and all that led up to it?"

"I am afraid I can't. It was very illuminating."

"I can't bear that you should despise me, Elizabeth." It was the first time that he had called her by name, and she was so surprised that she failed to reprove him. "What do you want me to do?—say whatever you wish and give me a chance, will you?"

"Does it matter what I think?"

"It matters more than anything in the world," said he roughly. "Look here—I'll take that kid over—educate it—send it home, if you like—but you don't want me to publish the fact to the world that he's mine, do you?"

"Mr. Riley—I have no right to dictate——"

"Oh, what's the use of arguing! I haven't a minute to spare—your husband is waiting to begin a game of chess—for God's sake give me a chance. I'll do anything!"

"I don't want you to ignore your obligations," said Mousie, unable to understand what had come over him. He did not seem to be acting a part. "It is, in my opinion, your solemn duty to do what you can for that little child to save him from becoming a bazaar waif. He is your son, just the same as that other one in England, only the law does not enforce a recognition of the fact. Can't you see for yourself how dreadful it is to let your own flesh and blood sink to the depths?"

"I never gave it a thought before!"

"That's the trouble. Men never think of the consequences of their ill-doing!"

"They don't meet women like you often enough. If I promise to act differently in future, will you smile on me, as before?"

"I shall certainly feel more kindly towards you—though I would rather you were less idle and made something more out of your life. It is a terrible thing to think of the trouble that can come out of too much mis-spent leisure and immorality."

"That's it! I have been too lonely, selfish and idle. You will have to take me in hand. Will you?"

It was very gratifying to Mousie to feel that Peter Riley was looking to her for help to lead a better life. If she could be useful in such a way, she was only too glad.

"If you are in earnest——"

"Deadly earnest! You are the most wonderful pal a fellow could have."

It was what Gareth had often told her in the old days, with one difference. Gareth had not looked so fiercely agitated; his eyes had never had that strained look; he had never been in such deadly earnest. Mousie began to feel sorry for Peter Riley and excuse his delinquencies on the grounds that his wife had deserted him, leaving him to fall into sin

and mischief. He was another of those great irresponsible babies that needed taking care of.

"Good-night," she said, with her old smile of kindly tolerance.

Peter Riley stooped and kissed her hand with old-fashioned courtesy, then returned to Gareth in the drawing-room.

It was not because Mousie was wanting in intelligence that she did not realise the fact that Peter was falling in love with her, but because she was too modest and inexperienced to recognise the symptoms. He was lonely and idle, therefore, it was natural for him to want to make an intimate friend of her and be jealous and angry if she withdrew. Men loved to talk to some sympathetic woman, in whom they could confide their troubles, and receive sympathy. They benefited more from a woman's helpful sympathy than a parson's sermons. It was very dreadful, indeed, that he should have lived in such an immoral way—he, a married man!—but then, it was his wife's fault for having left him to his own devices, when the temptations of his life were great.

If it were at all possible to influence Peter Riley for good, Mousie felt she should try now, while she had the opportunity and was so high in his respect and regard. If she shirked, hers would be the blame. He was a queer mixture of wickedness and charm, and his honesty went far towards inspiring her with hope in ultimate success. Like Bob Oathwait, he wanted looking after, and she and Gareth had their hands full.

The Wynstays returned to Gungaserai to prepare for Christmas, as both these neighbours were to be their guests. Peter gave up his annual visit to Calcutta to spend a few days with Gareth and Mousie, for Bob Oathwait would be there, and he was confident of having Mousie a great deal to himself. Bob would attach himself to his old friend Gareth, and leave the field clear for him with Gareth's wife—the

little Puritan, who was unlike any woman Peter had met in his life! He was so full of Elizabeth Wynstay, that he made a journey to Talbegan for the pleasure of discussing her with Bob Oathwait, as he was ready to burst with the need to talk with someone of her.

Bob, who was half tipsy after days of "soaking," listened dully, resenting none of the crude eulogies of Mrs. Wynstay's charms, and agreeing that there was no one on earth to hold a candle to her. "Not beautiful, by God!" he cried, thumping the table in his shanty, "but one of the very best! Gareth is a damned lucky beggar—hic—and I hope he knows it!"

"He doesn't," said Peter. "I have watched him closely, and he's too matter-of-fact. She's the sort to thrive on love, and he lives all the while in the clouds, forgetting all about her. Did you say she isn't beautiful? What is beauty? . . . Her face grows on you till you see only sweetness and loveableness. And, Gad!—what perfect proportions! The figure of a Venus! The curve of her arm appeals to me more than a straight nose. Her slender shape and the free grace of her movements are poetry. Have you ever noticed her voice? It has no roughness—no edge to it. It is like velvet. That fellow Gareth isn't half aware of the wonder of her."

"I don't go so far as all that," said Bob Oathwait, gulping down a neat whisky. "You seem to have been studying her with the eyes of an artist and the mind of a sensualist. If you don't look out, you'll be making a fool of yourself and get the boot. Mrs. Wynstay isn't of this generation. She's Early Victorian and virtuous. I couldn't see her taking a lover. Besides, she's keen on her husband."

"She won't keep that up long if he doesn't wake up and look to his chances."

"You're infatuated, Peter. That's what you are,

and all because you are damned lazy and have too little to do. I'd take a change, if I were in your place, or you'll be getting into mischief. Women are the devil!"

"Not Elizabeth Wynstay. Now she's the sort of wife that would have made a paradise of Madhupara. A real woman—a helpmate—one you could depend upon to stick to you and not let you down."

"Take my advice and go away for a change, old son," said Bob. "You are in danger of losing your head."

"You will probably think so when I tell you what I am doing for that kid the woman, Golabi, presented me with. I am sending him to a convent in the hills, and when he is old enough, I'll put him in a school at home. He's to get his chance, the little devil, so that I stand well with Elizabeth Wynstay. The woman must go. I have lied to her that my wife's returning and she can't stay. Somehow, I hate the sight of her—I have completely turned against the sort of life I have been leading. When you meet girls like Wynstay's wife, it makes you sick to think of the things you have done and the women you have known!"

"What do you suppose you'll get, running after Elizabeth Wynstay? Help yourself to another. I say, whisky for me, and let all women go to hell."

Peter Riley helped himself generously, and lifting his glass, drank to his success with "the woman I adore."

"You're—hic—a dam' fool," said Bob.

"All things come to those who know how to wait," said he, and changed the subject.

CHAPTER XV

A MINISTERING ANGEL

THERE was a chilly morning shortly after this, when Gareth awoke feeling a mass of pains and aches, and like most strong men, was convinced that he was going to die. Mousie was then in her element, full of anxiety and a devoted nurse. To have Gareth ill and dependent upon her, was to be kept busy every moment of the day, fussing like a hen over her solitary chicken, and spending every thought and breath for him.

The weather was beautiful, as it generally is in Bengal, in December, so there was some trouble in diagnosing the cause of his indisposition, which could not be due to heat or damp. He must have eaten something that had not agreed. Now what was it? . . .

"Where is the pain, dear?" she asked, bending over him tenderly.

"Oh, I don't know—everywhere," he groaned.

Mousie sat on the edge of the bed and rubbed his back. Was it soothing? Gareth liked the gentle massage and acknowledged her query with a nod. "Don't you think I had better take your temperature?"

As he grunted, she glided away to the medicine cupboard and fetched a clinical thermometer. In her busy life with her parents, her mother had been the nurse, not she, so Mousie was, in reality, very ignorant of what was necessary in serious illnesses,

and unfamiliar with the reading of the instrument. It had to be shaken down. This she did, faithfully, then, remembering that it should be washed, ran to the bath and dipped it into a can of water which had been placed on the stand some time ago for Gareth's shaving, after which she wiped the instrument and placed it in his mouth.

Five minutes later, she carried it to the window and nearly fainted when the mercury registered 108°. It meant that Gareth was very terribly ill indeed. What was she to do? She must never tell him, or it would alarm him and make him collapse.

"What is it?" came Gareth's voice from the bed when she delayed to acquaint him with the reading.

"I—you have some fever——"—she shook the mercury down hurriedly—"just a little, darling. I think I'll get the Doctor Babu and make him prescribe."

"But how much did it say?" he persisted. "I can tell by your tone that you are keeping the truth from me. Is it high?"

"You don't seem so hot," she temporised, her knees shaking and her voice sounding scared.

"Give it to me, Mousie, I am not a child—why did you shake it down?" He sounded cross and irritable, so she handed him the instrument, glad that she had shaken it down.

"Good God! It is 103° though you shook it down! What could it have been? What *was* it?" Gareth was nervous and excited.

"One hundred and eight, dear," said Mousie, trying not to appear terrified. "I knew of a child in hospital living for two days on something like that. People can stand very high temperatures, you know, for——"

"But it's very strange, I don't seem to feel so hot! Send for the Doctor, quick, he had better come."

Mousie ran to the verandah and despatched a peon

to call the native doctor urgently. How she wished a properly qualified physician were on the spot; but it was India, all over!—in these lonely places, human life was a negligible quantity to the Government!

She returned to Gareth, who looked flushed and uneasy.

"I wonder what is really wrong with me?" he soliloquised. "Are you sure you shook it down before you took my temperature?"

"I did, darling. Several times and read it too." Mousie's lips shook with nervousness. If there was anything seriously wrong with her beloved, she did not know how she could possibly bear to know it!

Gareth puzzled long. Suddenly he said. "Did you wash it?"

"I always do, dear," she replied, still rubbing his back with soft, sympathetic hands.

"In what did you wash it?—the tub?" A zinc bath tub always stood in the tiled bath-space, full of water carried up from the river.

"No—the can on the washstand."

"Surely the water was warm?"

Mousie's eyes widened with a look of sudden illumination. "Of course!—and I never once thought of that! Oh, Gareth!—it was pretty warm too. But I only dipped it!"

"Quite enough to send the mercury leaping!" He laughed with relief and Mousie too. "Let's try again." This time he satisfied himself of the state of the thermometer and found that he was only slightly feverish, and was considerably easier in mind. "I did have the wind up, anyone would, to think they were a hundred and eight! Oh, Mousie, you're no good!" and with a laugh he turned over and dozed.

He had said she was "no good," and Mousie was desperately hurt. It had the effect of subduing her thoroughly, but not discouraging her, for she put up a chicken broth on a stove in the pantry just as her

mother used to do for her father in his illnesses, saying that servants could not be trusted to make it so well, and when the doctor arrived—a stout Indian in garments that were a compromise between Indian and European—she was on hand to take his instructions.

"Sir," said the *Babu* after punching the Magistrate all over, "it is my opinion that you have taken the chill. It would be good if your honour took a dose of castor oil."

"I'm damned if I will!" said the patient rebelliously. "I won't—I assure you, I won't. Not unless I am dying."

"I'll prepare it for you quite tastelessly, dear," said Mousie encouragingly.

"You couldn't. Nothing on earth can camouflage castor oil. Think of something else." Gareth shuddered and looked sulky.

The Doctor Babu went into a lengthy explanation why castor oil was necessary under the circumstances. In threatening, inflammatory cases, he did not care to use anything else, and it was his advice to take an ordinary dose of castor oil. He would call again in the afternoon.

Thus, Mousie was faced with the problem of making her patient take something the thought of which, to him, was equal to an emetic.

How cross he was, and how difficult to manage! He was hanged if he would take a medicine he had carefully avoided ever since he was a kid. Why the devil couldn't anything else do as well? No! He was determined, and hugged a hotwater bottle instead, ordering Mousie to let him alone.

It broke her heart that he should be so impatient and sharp with her; nevertheless, she brewed a decoction of castor oil with orange juice and various flavourings to conceal the taste; and whipping up the whole into a liquid emulsion, brought it to his bed-

side when a groan announced the fact that he was not asleep.

"Try this, darling," she said in her patient voice. "I'll send to town in future for cachets; but in the meantime, this might be useful."

"What is it?" he growled, in a vile temper, as is generally the case with men, when a little ill.

"Orange cordial," she announced gravely, inwardly terrified that he would suspect her and discover the truth.

"Who said I could have 'orange cordial'? and where did you raise it?"

"I made it myself from a recipe I knew."

"Orange?—well, there can't be any harm in *orange*."

"You needn't fear it. Dad used to have it every time."

Gareth took the glass and swallowed the mixture at a draught, then looked at her steadily. "You did me in the eye there!—oh, well, I might have known you'd get round it, somehow! You wives know how to take advantage of a sick husband; we're absolutely in your hands!"

"How surly you are, Garry! Say thank you," she laughed. "I had to get you to take it somehow, as it is the best thing for you."

"I'm hanged if I shall thank you for poisoning me with that beastly stuff!"

"Anyhow, you won't die, dear." Though she was not thanked for her service, she renewed the hot-water in the bottle and fetched and carried for him all day, till, in the afternoon, he broke into a sweat and the fever and pains left him.

It was Mousie who helped him to change into dry things and made him comfortable in bed, after which she sat beside him and chatted cheerfully of everything that was calculated to amuse and interest him.

He watched her in the darkened room that night fixing up everything for his comfort, placing drink-

ing water at his elbow on the bedside table, a watch, a flashlight, cigarettes, matches, and when she slipped into the twin bed alongside, he reached out an arm and pulled her to him.

"You're a wonder to me, Mousie," said he. "So patient and forbearing. I have been like a bear with a sore head all day, and you have had nothing but smiles for me. I don't deserve your goodness. I am surprised you can put up with me!" He kissed her gratefully, little dreaming that the act lifted her to heaven.

"Then, I am of some good after all?" she said, suppressing a sob of gladness.

"What do you mean?"

"You said, this morning, after I had bungled with the thermometer, that I was 'no good.'"

"If I did, I should have been kicked. The thing is, you are *too* good to me. I am getting thoroughly spoilt."

As he looked heavy-eyed and sleepy, Mousie kissed him and returned to her pillow, afraid of staying a moment longer in his arms than she was welcome. After he had fallen asleep, she watched him with adoring eyes, wondering if any girl in the world was so fortunate as she. In her mind, he was a god among men, so big and strong and handsome, with dear, honest eyes and a smile of great sweetness. To think that he should have become *her* husband was a miracle, for Mousie knew she was not beautiful, nor accomplished, nor rich. Tears gushed out of her eyes when she recalled how their friendship had begun—just on an ocean liner, companions who gravitated to each other because they were going to the same station, and would have to be neighbours. They had never flirted, for Gareth was not a flirt. Girls tried to make much of him on the voyage, and Mousie recalled how proud she had been that he preferred to talk to her of books and places, read aloud

to her, or fall asleep while she read to him as they sat in deck chairs, side by side. He used to say that she was the most restful soul he knew, and that a fellow felt he was not obliged, while with her, to keep talking and be entertaining. Then, in India, they had many tastes in common and were a great deal together, which had made her mother think that he would be sure to propose marriage. But Gareth was not then a marrying man and Mousie had never been able to kindle the divine spark in his eyes. Someone else had done that by some feminine trick, or beauty of person and, then, had not valued what she had won!

It was Mousie's pleasure to serve her "lord." To her, he was a "lord of creation," and hers, particularly, since God had given him to her. In the morning, when he awoke and talked of going down to his work at the *kacharis*, she would not hear of it, but kept him at home while she enjoyed caring for his wants and coddling him with attentions.

Peter Riley came over and watched them both as he would have watched a play, staged for his benefit, and sneered when he had the chance of speaking to her alone. "You treat him as though he were a bed-ridden paralytic," he grumbled. "I wonder he isn't ashamed to let you fag for him as you do."

"I love it. Besides, he isn't too fit, and it is rest he needs more than anything," she replied.

"Anyone would prefer to lie about if someone else did the fetching and carrying, only you'd expect a great hefty fellow like him to have a little consideration for his wife."

"He would do the same for me."

"I doubt it. He wouldn't have the sixth sense you have developed for discovering what's wanted before it is realised by the invalid." He referred to Mousie's having stuffed a cushion under Gareth's elbow to support it while he read the paper in a recumbent position. "You really make me ratty."

"What's it to you?" she returned. "You would be pretty glad to get the same care if you were sick."

"I'd have to want it!"

"Didn't your wife fuss about you when you were feeling ill?"

Peter laughed. "I had a few bouts of malaria, I remember, and she slept at the opposite side of the house for fear it was going to be typhoid. The bearer did all the nursing."

Mousie's look of horrified disapproval rewarded his candour, and he proceeded to draw harrowing tales of the neglect from which he had suffered with a wife on the spot. "Would you look after me if I were very ill?"

"I would, indeed, if you came to me to be nursed."

"I'll remember that. Unfortunately, I am acclimatised and never get ill."

Gareth, entering in time to hear the latter request and the reply, could not resist telling him, despite his wife's blushes, the tale of the thermometer.

"I think it so cruel of you, Garry!"

"It is too good a story to be lost!" said he laughing. "You should have seen her face, Riley. You would have thought that I was about to breathe my last, and trying all the time to keep the alarming state of affairs from me. It was a scream!"

"You were frightened too," said Mousie.

"I guess I was. Had the wind up, I admit. You won't rinse a clinical thermometer in warm water again, will you?"

"It is all very well to blame you, Mrs. Wynstay," said Peter. "Just you tell him that it was his business to have read the thing first. He wasn't so bad, either. But he'll never do a thing for himself so long as he has you to do it for him."

"I am getting thoroughly lazy nowadays," said Gareth, smiling affectionately at his wife. "My little mouse makes me so comfortable that I am losing

all taste for going about and visiting my neighbours."

"So am I," said Peter, "though it is for a very different reason," and his eyes rested meaningly on Mousie, who missed his point as it had suddenly occurred to her that it was time to give Gareth his bovril.

This was more than Peter could support, so he took up his hat and went out, saying he had a little business to attend to.

The business was to smoke a cigarette on the river bank down by the bathing *ghat* which adjoined Gareth's garden, and recover from feelings of covetousness and hatred. It was sheer lunacy to hate Gareth for what was no fault of his own, and idiotic to covet his wife since she had no interest in any other man. He sat on a projecting boulder watching the gulls flashing their wings in the fading sunlight, the fishing *dinghis* drifting down the current with nets outspread, till human activities, nearer home, entertained him for a while.

Coolie women were filing down to the water's edge with earthen vessels on their hips, little children trailing alongside. It was not an unfamiliar sight, nor did it fail to interest. They waded into the river to their waists, disrobed, indifferent to the presence of a spectator on the bank, and bathed. With a great clamour of voices, mingled with the children's cries of delight, they splashed and wrung out their wet garments, then robed themselves again in the same, with consummate skill and modesty, while retiring gradually from the water. They, then, filled their earthen vessels, and balancing them on their heads, wended their way homewards, leaving the children to play in the shallows. In the manner of children, with no one responsible in charge, one shortly afterwards, swam too far out, and was caught in a swirling current which carried him outward with great rapidity. Shrieks and screams drew Peter's

attention to the spot, and he saw the little black head bobbing about in the current battling for dear life. In a little while the child's strength would be exhausted, and he would drown.

In a twinkling, Peter's boots shot off, his coat lay on the bank and he was in the water swimming to the aid of the child.

Crowds gathered on the bank in a moment, and the hush of expectation was uncanny. Then, a great uproar of relief broke forth from the crowd watching, as he was seen to grasp the hair of the struggling child and turn back.

Mousie heard the noise and saw the servants running past the verandah to the scene, shouting as they ran that something was happening in the water.

"I'll be back in a minute," she told Gareth, and hurried down to the bottom of the garden in time to see Peter emerge from the river with the weeping child, whom he handed over to his friends.

With the natural stoicism of natives, they received the half-drowned child as a matter of course, and carried him home to his parents in the bazaar, leaving Peter to return unthanked to the bungalow, and dripping from head to foot.

Mousie met him on the steps with a whisky and soda and a smile of warm approval.

"I think that was splendid of you, Mr. Riley."

"Not at all," said he. "As easy as winking. Now if I could only take cold and be laid up in your bungalow for a week, it would be ideal!"

"Not from my point of view!" she returned. "You are not Gareth, you know."

"Yes—worse luck! so you give me whisky, and I am not likely even to sneeze!"

CHAPTER XVI

CHRISTMAS DAY

It did not feel like Christmas Day on the 25th of December when the sun rose in the cloudless heavens above Gungaserai, shedding its generous warmth over field and river. Its golden rays intensified the vivid hues of nature, revealing rich autumn tints in the dense foliage of the tall trees and flourishing shrubs. There were purple shadows on the sun-baked earth, from which the dust rose in spiral twists before a whimsical wind. Instead of a snow-clad landscape, naked branches bared to bleak winds, and icicles festooning the eaves, there were shady trees and flowering creepers trailing their tendrils in the gentle breeze, and cerulian skies mirrored in a tranquil river. The mighty Ganges, at its lowest ebb, having lost its force, ran serenely between islands of yellow sand, its roar no longer heard.

Christmas at Gungaserai was like Christmas at many another rural station in India, with no church bells to remind Christians of their duty to God, but plenty of turkey and ham, with wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and a postal service to enrich the occasion with letters and gifts.

Mousie dropped a kiss on Gareth's brow the moment his eyes opened to the light of day.

"A merry Christmas, dear."

"A merry Christmas to you, old thing," he yawned. "Funny it sounds, when there is no chance of merry-making!"

"I don't know!—I think we have heaps to make us glad—speaking for myself," she added.

"In many ways—yes," he agreed, and drawing her to him, he kissed her affectionately. "For instance, we have health and plenty of occupation, food and a roof over our heads. But nothing to be hilarious over!"

"Anyhow, we'll do our best to live up to Christmas," said Mousie as she prepared to rise. "We have a perfectly wonderful turkey from Calcutta, and a ham that can't be beaten anywhere, to say nothing of a plum pudding and champagne. I hope Mr. Riley and Bob Oathwait will enjoy themselves. Have you noticed that Bob Oathwait is drinking much less, these days?"

"The humanising effect of feminine society. You have inspired him with a return of ambition, and he is putting on the brakes—besides, his wife might come out, so it is as well to begin his conversion."

"She must have received my letter, so I shall be hearing by cable if she means to come."

"She'll never come!"

"I think she will, for the worst of wives would recognise her duty if she thought her husband was ill."

"I wouldn't mind taking a bet on it—but—have you seen what's beside your pillow?"

Mousie looked, and saw a small brown paper parcel, and seized it eagerly. "From you, Garry?"

"Yes, old dear. I hope it will fit."

Mousie found that the package contained a velvet lined case from a jeweller's, with a diamond ring of great brilliance embedded within.

The diamonds did not sparkle more than her eyes with the joy of feeling that Gareth had thought of sending for such a beautiful gift for her.

"Like it?" he asked.

"I adore it! Rings have always been my weakness. If I were rich, I do believe I'd be vulgar

enough to wear rings on every finger!" She hugged Gareth and then skipped over to the drawer of her dressing-table and produced her present for him——

"Nothing very grand," said she, "but useful." She fastened a square gold watch on his wrist and lifted her mouth for his kiss.

"How nice!" he cried admiringly as he turned it about and viewed it from every angle. "My old ticker is quite outclassed! I like it tremendously, Mousie. Very smart, indeed!"

After the subject of their presents was exhausted, Mousie proffered a request. She wanted to ask the DeMellos to dinner. It was rather late to think of it, and they might refuse, but, it felt so mean to leave the poor things alone even on Christmas Day! "They are very harmless."

At which Gareth laughed. They were not even on visiting terms with the DeMellos, but Mousie had done them a great kindness not very long ago and they were eternally grateful, though careful not to push themselves into notice. Gareth Wynstay was in a Service of the Government which entitled him to be considered "heaven born," while Alexander DeMello was in the lower grades of deputies on the Uncovenanted list, and, moreover, was Eurasian and socially impossible. He tried civil cases with limited powers, and yearned for promotion which was painfully slow. Frequently Indians were passed over his head in his own department, and, never by any chance, was he given an appointment in a large station where his young wife might have had an opportunity of seeing a bit of life and of getting a good time among those of her own set. The reason was pathetic. DeMello was a victim of the colour prejudice. His late mother was a native, his father the descendant of a Portugese settler whose ancestors had freely intermarried with Indians, so that he was in a worse case than if he had been wholly of Indian

blood. This admixture, and the obviousness of the fact, had marked him as socially inferior, and departmentally of small account. His wife, Elvira Christiana, was also the offspring of a mixed marriage, and though in her way a pretty girl, was very dark-skinned, of that opaque colouring that was vociferously Eastern; but her eyes were almond-shaped and positively beautiful, her teeth brilliantly white and even, while her animation and youth gave her decided attractiveness and charm.

Mousie would have called when she first arrived, but was influenced not to do so by Gareth, who thought it unnecessary. The DeMellos would never be received in society, so it was absurd to spoil them with notice. However, a few weeks after her arrival she had an urgent call from the Doctor Babu to lend certain articles of necessity for a sickroom, as Mrs. DeMello was about to become a mother. As her arrangements had been based on inexperienced calculations, there was no professional nurse expected to arrive from the nearest town till a week later. In any case, it would take more than a couple of days to bring someone to Gungaserai who could be trusted with the case, so a native woman from the bazaar, whose methods of delivering a patient in labour would turn students of midwifery pale, had been called in, with the result that little Mrs. DeMello was all but dead. When the Doctor Babu took charge, the infant was born dead and the mother was at her last gasp—so it seemed.

Mousie hurried to the scene to offer her help, and common sense stood her in good stead under the native doctor's directions, so that together they pulled the sufferer through, her recovery being due mainly to her wonderful spirit of optimism and endurance. Elvira DeMello's courage and patience won the admiration of those who nursed her, and Mousie was ashamed that she had neglected to know her for so long. After all, the DeMellos were not

Indians, and it was cruel to have treated them so snobbishly.

From that day, she always bowed when she met Mrs. DeMello out for a stroll alone or with her husband, and stopped to exchange a pleasant word or two. For Gareth's sake, since he did not care to associate on equal terms with his subordinate in the station, she had never stretched a point and asked them to tea. Mr. DeMello impressed her as very insignificant and unattractive, though she had learned that he was an excellent husband and devoted to his wife, who was a great deal younger than himself and not so much attached. She had married him to rid her parents of the burden of her keep—this she had confessed to Mousie in her illness—and, since her marriage, had made up her mind to stand by him and justify her vows. Elvira's one great passion was for jewellery; and her greatest ambition in life, to own a motor car; but as Alexander, her husband, earned a very small salary, she was foredoomed to disappointment in both cases. It had made her very happy when Mousie sent the mechanic round with the car to take the invalid for drives, when convalescent, and the act of condescension was one that husband and wife deeply appreciated.

When Mousie suggested having the DeMellos at their Christmas dinner, it seemed to Gareth that she was going a bit too far in the kindness of her heart. It wasn't at all necessary.

"Still, this is Christmas and one sometimes does unnecessary things if they give pleasure. So if you don't mind——"

"I don't care a hoot. Please yourself, my dear."

"I was only wondering if Mr. Riley or Bob Oathwait would be put out."

"Why should you care? They'll have to appear as if they are charmed, even if they are bored. But I believe it is a mistake. People of that sort are

best left where they are. No good can come of making the girl discontented with her lot."

"I don't think it will. It should give her an outing and something to look back upon. It is very lonely for the DeMellos—worse than it is for us, for at least we see company, sometimes, and pay visits. These people know no one. They don't mix with the natives, and their friends are in Calcutta, which is too expensive a trip to be undertaken more than once in a while."

Gareth again told her to do as she pleased, and Mousie walked to the little bungalow by the railway station and presented her invitation verbally—an act which she regretted endlessly.

"It is scarcely a dinner party, but we expect Mr. Riley and Mr. Oathwait some time this afternoon. They are the only other guests," she explained, while seated in a cane chair with a crochet-antimacassar at her back. The living-room, which was the only reception room in the bungalow, was painfully cheap and vulgar, for Elvira had no artistic sense or eye for colour, and used shades that clashed horribly.

"How verree kind of you, Mrs. Vinstā'!" she gasped, completely astounded. "Alick and I will be so glad to accept. My!—von't he be surprised! I vill have to tell my cook, or he will kill a fowl." Her eyes sparkled brightly with pride in the invitation, and Mousie could see that her mind was concerned with her clothes. "I haven't any evening dresses," she confessed downheartedly.

"That won't matter. Come in anything, I will wear something quite simple."

Elvira's young face cleared, and she followed the caller to the gate, flushed with excitement in the prospect of meeting and dining with "swells."

Alexander was glad for her sake, and spent some time in brushing his navy serge suit which used to be called his "church clothes" when he lived within reach of a place of worship.

Mousie thought Elvira DeMello looked a pathetic sight when she arrived that evening in a white muslin frock which made her complexion look darker by contrast, and black shoes and stockings. However, her face and the gracious curves of her pretty figure redeemed much. Her animation made her interesting, and her youthfulness disarmed criticism. For the rest, she showed that she knew how to conduct herself, and her natural wit prevented her from being considered dull. The flash of her even teeth, and the sparkle of her dark eyes, drew more than one pair of admiring eyes to her face, and Alexander appeared very proud, indeed, of her.

Peter Riley, who was greatly bored at being parted from Mousie, amused himself drawing out the stranger's ideas, and as a reprisal on his hostess, was flattering and attentive.

"How is it I have never met you before?" he asked lazily.

"I suppose it is because you never thought it vorth while to call?" she retorted with a giggle and a flirt of her lashes.

"I'll call to-morrow, if I may."

Elvira giggled again and tossed her head. "You reallee mean it? Don't come in the morning, for you von't find me dressed! I never dress till the afternoon."

"Then I'll certainly come in the morning!"

"You *do* pick one up!" she simpered, blushing. "I mean, I am in a dressing gown and slippers till twelve, when I bathe and have breakfast. I vill give you tea at five if you come then."

"How would you like a trip in my motor boat?"

Elvira's eyes widened and she squeaked with delight. "Oh, my!—how lovelee! Will there be room for my hubbee?"

"No. I am sorry to say it seats only two comfortably," he lied.

Her face visibly lightened. "Ne'mind, he von't be jealous!"

"You are educating him very well," said Riley.

"He knows better than to mind, for I couldn't bear a jealous husband. Alick!" She leant across and claimed her husband's attention. "Mr. Rilee vants me to have a run in his motor boat to-morrow."

"Very kind, I am sure, Sir," said the obsequious DeMello, which afterwards called down on his luckless head a curtain lecture. "Vhy did you call him 'Sir'? You are verree stupid, Alick! Didn't you notice that no one said 'Sir' to anyone?" Alexander looked properly reproved. "You see, my dear, I was such a stranger there." "In good societee," she informed him, "you'll notice that nobody treats anyone as a superior. We are all the same, and no 'Sirring' anyone." Alexander promised to remember in future, and was more than ever proud of his young wife.

Mousie was surprised that the fastidious Riley should have proposed a trip on the water with the wife of the "Assistant Sub-deputy," as he called DeMello, and she was worried for the rest of the evening. Somehow, she did not think it safe that a man like Riley should pay attentions to such a young and unsophisticated creature as Elvira. She would not understand his way, and might attach greater importance than was necessary to his remarks. After the DeMellos had gone, she lingered in the moonlit verandah, where she had seen them off, to reprove her idle and mischievous guest.

"I am wondering why you thought it incumbent on you to ask Mrs. DeMello to accompany you on the river?"

"You asked them to dine and I did my bit to please."

"You might have drawn the line after being socially pleasant."

"Do you mind so very much?" he asked, a gleam

in his eyes. In a moment, his manner was softly caressing. "My God! If I thought I could make you jealous——"

"Mr. Riley!" Mousie was indignant. "*I* jealous of you? Are you mad?" She wondered if it was the champagne?

"Why should you care if I flirt with that DeMello girl? I am a fool to wish you would! Yet why take me to task?"

"Because I could not bear to think that you should turn her silly young head with your flattery and attentions, when she is not of your class and nothing good can come of your being too charming to her."

"I am glad you think I am capable of being 'too charming,'" said he sarcastically. "If I don't keep my hand in, I'll lose practice and become dull."

"I am sorry I asked her to dine."

"So am I, for it banished me from you."

Mousie looked at him fixedly, then had to laugh lest he should think she attached undue importance to his nonsense. It wouldn't be Peter Riley if he did not cajole and flatter. "I never know what to make of you, Mr. Riley."

"Why don't you call me Peter? It is frightfully old-fashioned to parade the 'Mister.' I always call you Elizabeth."

"Do you? I don't remember giving you permission."

"I don't remember asking for it. It was how I felt. There are some girls you cannot be distant with——"

"I am not a girl. You forget——"

"I forget nothing concerning you," said he, leaning against the door and toying with her bead chain. Mousie quietly relieved him of the chain, and stepped towards the drawing-room, feeling that it must have been the champagne, for Peter Riley was not behaving himself properly. She could almost imagine that he was trying to flirt with her!

For the rest of the evening, Peter was in an intractable mood, and retired unamiably to his room as Bob Oathwait set the example and said good-night; for he could no longer get a chance of talking with Mousie alone.

It was Christmas, and Mousie wondered if Gareth would sit up late, as was his wont, writing reports and judgments, or adding episodes to an adventure story he was writing for a popular magazine. Sometimes, he was so very late that she was asleep before he came and never even knew when he slipped into the twin-bed alongside. Of late, even when he found her awake, he appeared too tired to talk, and murmuring good-night, was asleep as his head touched the pillow.

But to-night it was Christmas Day, and he would surely want to love her? She had learned a few things since her marriage, and one of them was that a man had his moods, which every tactful and loving wife needed to study if she hoped to hold her husband for ever. When in the mood to love, he was the most wonderful being in the world, so tender and sweet to her, so humble in his wooing, so grateful for her sympathy and goodness! At such times, she would have given her soul for his pleasure; the happiness that was hers amounted to pain. But he was not often in that mood, and long periods elapsed during which Mousie's yearning for his demonstrations of love were agonising. It was only occupation and other acquired interests that made her win through without breaking down and becoming neurotic and hysterical.

Mousie dressed for bed, telling herself with beating heart that it was Christmas night—the great festival of happiness. She was nothing if not sentimental and loving. She had not dreamed that it was in her to be as wholly and terribly in love as she was with Gareth. And he was worth it, she told herself. The little faults he had were as nothing when compared

with his virtues. Faults and all, she adored him and desired him for her lover, her partner, to the end of her life.

Mousie grew restless as the hours passed and still he did not come. She next crept out of bed and tiptoeing to the door of his den, looked inside.

Gareth was there, lying back in an easy chair, a cigarette smouldering in his fingers, his eyes staring into space, while in his face was such a look of tragic yearning that Mousie's heart was twisted with alarm.

She understood, and slipped away, weeping silently. Gareth wanted her to think him too busy to go to her, while it was nothing but thoughts of that other woman that were keeping him away. He wanted to live that Christmas night, in spirit, with her, not with the woman he had married and could never really love.

CHAPTER XVII

MEETING THE EXPRESS

WHILE Peter Riley tried to make Mousie jealous by going out of his way to charm Elvira DeMello, the Wynstays prepared to receive a new guest. A cable arrived in Christmas week to the effect that Mrs. Oathwait was sailing immediately. So she had accepted Mousie's invitation, and Gareth had lost his bet! She was not so selfish but that the news of her husband's illness had touched her to the point of making her yield to a sense of duty. Mousie was very glad. At least, the arrival of a guest would be a diversion.

When Bob heard the news, he shook like an aspen leaf and then drank heavily, for he had hoped that his wife would not come. He was now obliged to face the inevitable ordeal of meeting her again. The old quarrel seemed as fresh as if it had taken place yesterday, and the impossibility of patching up the wounds jealousy and outrage had dealt his very soul, made him feel broken and unfit.

"I could not live with her again," he confided to Mousie. "If I had never cared, it would have been easy to pretend. But, God!—Mrs. Wynstay! she was my *life!* When she proved no better than others whose names have been dragged in the gutter of scandal, I could have killed her. I sent her away, instead, and the world has since been hateful and dark."

"Wipe all the past out," said Mousie, "and try to begin again. The fact of her coming out shows

that she has a change of heart. Forgive all that hurt you—forget it. If she wishes to be kind, meet her half way."

"It will be almost impossible. You don't know her. She is as false as hell. The truth is not in her. I should never be able to trust her except in the company of yourself and Gareth. You two are so perfectly united—such an ideal couple, that it is my hope it will do her good to see you together. It will teach her what married love can do. But for you, I would have lost all faith in marriage."

"I cannot believe," said Mousie, "that anyone is altogether bad. There is a vulnerable spot somewhere, and the thing is to find it. When she comes, I will do my best to understand her, and I hope, with all my heart, it will yet come to pass that you two will be re-united. But—don't mind my saying it—you will have to give up drinking so hard. It isn't good for you," she spoke very kindly, laying a hand on his arm, "and you want to be *yourself* in every way when she comes."

Bob looked scared and tremulous. "You—don't understand. Some men can get along without alcohol. I cannot. I have tried—God knows how hard I have tried—only lately—but my nerves are shattered. I shake, I am sick—desperately ill, if I stop. I have to go on, now. It is the only thing that helps me to keep going. I honestly believe if I shut off altogether, I'd die."

"Take it in smaller quantities, and at longer intervals. It needs only strength of mind."

But Bob shook his head hopelessly. "You do not know. You cannot understand. Nobody who has not contracted the habit, can sympathise. I'm no good now without it, and smaller quantities have no effect at all. I might as well take plain water. It is too late to stop. I must go on—besides—*she* won't worry. She never cared a damn—excuse me! If it kills me, all the better for her. She's not

coming out for love of me! The reason of her coming at all is to help cut down expenses. With her here, I might get a chance to square my debt to you and Gareth. You have both been very good to me. You see, I wrote and explained the position fully. She knows now what we owe to Gareth and you, and common decency is bringing her here. I wonder what she is doing with the kid?"

Since Christmas Day, Mousie seemed to have been accumulating trouble. She was anxious about Elvira DeMello, and distressed about Bob and the drink, while she could never forget Gareth's face as it looked that Christmas night when he never came to bed and told her the next day that he had fallen asleep in his chair. She did not doubt the truth of the confession, for it was inevitable that he should have fallen asleep—in the end.

At any rate, she could better bear his pre-occupation over a love that was now out of his life, than that he should become easy prey for a flirt, which she believed Mrs. Oathwait was. With his mind full of the past, he was hardly likely to be attracted by the pretty face of their guest whom he already condemned and despised.

Mousie went about her duties with a troubled mind, the greatest problem being how she was to succeed in making Mrs. Oathwait recognise her duty to Bob, and the necessity to retrieve the harm her selfishness had done. It was her business to undertake the task of winning the unhappy fellow from his fatal slavery to alcohol, and nobody could do it better than a wife, if she cared enough to succeed. The pity of it was that Mrs. Oathwait did not care at all! so it was altogether a problem, indeed.

At last the day arrived when the ocean liner on which Mrs. Oathwait was a passenger was expected to dock in Calcutta, and Mousie spread dainty tops to bureaus and saw the bed made comfortable with snowy sheets; and placed flowers in a vase on the

writing-table. It was good that the weather was cold enough to do without *punkahs*, for long poles suspended from the ceiling with flapping frills or china matting, were so disfiguring to the look of a chamber. Without a *punkah*, the room looked home-like and attractive for the guest, in spite of the white-washed walls and stained ceiling cloth for which leakages through the thatch of the roof were responsible.

During the course of the day, a telegram was handed to Mousie, which she forwarded to the court-house where Gareth was at work. Shortly afterwards, Gareth hurried in looking impatient and annoyed.

"Damn that fellow Bob!" he cried testily. "Here he's funked the ordeal of meeting his wife and wants me to go! I don't believe he is ill unless he has been drinking so hard that he can't stand straight!"

Mousie took the telegram and read—

"For/Gods/sake/meet/wife/junction/at/three/too
"ill/to/move/staying/in/bed/Bob."

"I wonder? He has been looking dreadfully ill. I suppose you will have to go?"

"And, at once, if I am to be at the junction to meet that express. I will have to take the car, as no train is available from here for hours."

Gareth was obliged to make hurried arrangements for the work to be carried on without him till the following morning, and was soon speeding over the country roads in his two-seater, as it was a touch-and-go that he would be on the platform before the train discharged its passengers.

However, he did better than he had hoped to do, for he arrived on the platform as the train rushed in, and was quickly at the door of the compartment, assisting a lady to alight. She was slight, of

medium height, and dressed wonderfully well, her face shrouded from the glare by a gauze veil.

Yet, in spite of the veil, Gareth was petrified with shock when he recognised Lynette.

"*You?*" broke from his lips as native passengers hurried by, their bags and bundles clutched firmly, and children dragging at their heels. There were rarely English passengers for that junction.

"Yes, Gareth," came the unsteady reply.

"I—I did not know——"

"Of course—you could not!" (There were many Thelmas!) "Forgive me for coming—I—could not help it."

"My God!" With set jaw, he walked blindly through his duties, retrieving her luggage from the van, guiding her through the crowds, ordering coolies, sweeping them out of her way. All the while, she was mute, her head bent, and following him hurriedly till they had cleared the station and were beside the car. She did not even attempt to look up at him, for she knew without the need of occular evidence of the fact, that he had been shaken to the foundations of his being. For a few minutes, he busied himself strapping some of her luggage on the carrier behind.

From his point of view, it was an unspeakable thing that had happened—from hers, it was a daring adventure, and even though responsible for its happening, she was frightened, now that there was no going back.

"Gareth!" she murmured, when he took the wheel. "Forgive me!"

"You knew all the while?"

"Yes—all the while—from the *very beginning*—your name in the hotel register—a photograph Bob had of you——"

"Why in God's name did you lie?" He turned on her, his features quivering.

"Because—when Fate brought you to me—I—

wanted you so—I—*had* to lie!" She threw back her veil and met his eyes full—a look of pleading in hers. "I loved you, Gareth. You cannot doubt that I was madly in love with you. I am still, that is why I had to come when—I had the chance." She was, if anything, still more beautiful with tears in her dark-lashed eyes.

What was she saying? Gareth could not see straight for the rush of emotion within him. However, there was nothing for him to do but to move on. He put the car in motion and slipped out of the station yard his brain in a whirl. What was he to do?

What *was* he to do! . . .

"May I tell you something?" she asked, after a while.

Gareth nodded, feeling past speech, but he would not look at her again.

"It is just this—there are things that are past praying for. Nothing you or I can do will wipe out the memory of our life together in Scotland. I was wicked and you—weak. I was to blame. You were innocent. I don't care. I accept all the blame. You know, now, why I could not come out, passing myself off as your wife? Only, I hadn't the courage to confess. Sometimes, love makes us cowards. I thought I would never see you again—that we would keep the memory of that holiday in our hearts for ever"—her voice broke and the tears overflowed—"I can't speak of all I went through. Wylber Staunton met me—I wired—and he drove me to the house of a friend in the next county. I am sorry about him—he was in love with me, but I had no use for him or anyone else, after I parted from you. Perhaps you won't believe me?" she said, indifferently. "I should not blame you, after that first terrible lie! It doesn't matter, since we are nothing to each other now. I only wanted you to know, for it was rotten the way I left you!—were you very angry?"

Gareth flashed a look at her, but would not speak. Angry!—God! to think he could have had room for *anger* at that unforgettable crisis in his life! How nearly mad he had been with grief and loss, she would never know—or understand.

She continued, seeing that he was speechless.

"I could not think of any other way of ending everything between us. It had gone so much deeper than I had at first imagined possible. I thought in the beginning that it would be just a wonderful adventure between us both. I did not know that love could be like that!—I was afraid—for I never told you that—I had a baby—such a darling baby!—born in India—the link that keeps me bound to Bob, who is less than nothing to me. For my child's sake I have had to stand well with the world. Sometimes, I wish there had never been a child, for then I should have had nothing to hold me back. I have even wondered if I should not brave things out and let Bob do his worst. But whenever it has come to the pinch, I have not been able to do it. It would be utterly selfish and wrong to make a big scandal that must for ever injure the innocent."

She ceased speaking and stared sadly into space for awhile, a pathetic droop at the corner of her lips. Gareth stole a look again and again at her to satisfy his heart-hunger for her beauty, and he thought it an amazing thing that she should have all that mother-love and yet reveal a side to her character that was devoid of the moral sense and capable of downright dishonour. It was nothing to her to commit adultery, so long as the world never learned the truth of her exploits. For her child's sake, alone, she intended to have things in life both ways. So, while confessing a mad love for him, she had placed her child before him when it came to making the supreme decision. He did not understand it!—but he could only adore her beautiful face and enchanting personality. She was a woman without a conscience in

the matter of sex, and gifted with a thousand graces to charm.

It was a terrible situation she had brought about, and he hardly knew how he was going to deal with it. There was Mousie, ignorant of it all! How little she suspected that it was for Thelma Oathwait he had all but lost his mental balance. It was Thelma's treatment of him that had flung him into Mousie's arms. And now Thelma was here—ready to love him secretly, *if he wished.*

Poor Mousie!

Gareth could see her fussing over her guest full of kindness and hospitality, eager to mend the trouble in Bob's life and doing her unconscious best to ruin her own.

She was splendid! a lovely character! and he was very, very fond of her—but never, in all their intercourse, had he been so moved as he was now under the light contact of his arm with Lynette's shoulder whenever the bumps in the road threw them against each other.

"Say something to me, Gareth!" said she, presently. "Are you very sorry that you asked me to be your guest?"

"Why did you accept the invitation?" he asked sternly. To his mind it had been an act of wanton mischief.

"I have a feeling that Bob is dying, and I suppose it is my duty to be at hand. He was so incoherent when he wrote. It was only in his last letter, urging me to accept your wife's invitation, that I heard you were living so near. I did not know till then that you had married! It was a blow, Gareth—and so soon! Can you wonder that I came? I had to come, for it brought back everything—I was sick about it, Gareth. I thought that I would be able to understand it, if I saw her. It was terribly soon to forget! . . . How could you *want* to, *so soon?* It has been very different with me. I

flirted for a diversion, never seriously—never with my heart in it, after leaving you! Since then—there has never been anyone else. Is she very lovely, Gareth? Bob wrote that she was 'wonderful,' and he never raves of women."

"She isn't—pretty—you might think her plain—people do, till they know her well. But she *is* wonderful." Somehow, Gareth hated to talk of Mousie to Lynette. It seemed an offence, though why, he could not define. Lynette looked puzzled, but dropped the subject.

"I have to pinch myself to believe that I am actually with you, again, Gareth. It seems too strange to believe!"

Gareth made no answer. A graver calamity he could not have conceived than this!—to be obliged to entertain Lynette under his roof with Mousie as his wife and her hostess!

From time to time, Lynette spoke to him in her soft, wooing voice, every tone making music in his soul, but he could only answer in monosyllables, for he was fiercely resisting the temptation to draw the car up under the shade of some friendly tree on that deserted road, and snatch Lynette to his breast. It was the devil busy at his heart, whispering—*whispering* that they belonged to each other by the right of love alone. She and he, together, had plumbed the depths of every human delight—could he forget?

Then came the insidious thought—Bob would die. Left to himself, Bob must, assuredly, die soon—and then, there would only be Mousie to consider. Poor Mousie would never stand in his light. Some technical cause—and she could divorce him. There were so many ways of providing evidence for a divorce that would not affect Lynette's good name. Mousie would divorce him if Bob died and he confessed everything to her. For the present, he would exercise patience and go warily. He did not want to make a scandal for Lynette's sake, who was pas-

sionately devoted to her child, but when Bob died . . .

"Gareth!" Lynette spoke again. "I am thinking that you and I are not going to spoil things for your wife. It wouldn't be fair to make her miserable. Even though you do not love her,—and you don't, Gareth!—for I know you love me. I have read it in every laboured breath you have drawn since we met a little while ago,—even though you love me, we have got to be decent to her while I am your guest. Isn't that so? But I shall be happier for knowing that you are mine, all the same! It will be our secret, hidden carefully from the eyes of the world, and all the more precious for the need to deny ourselves the things that mean so much. I am right, am I not, Gareth?" It was the little touch calculated to win his approbation and respect for her good intentions.

"It was a frightful mistake your coming out like—this," broke from Gareth.

"It was," she replied meekly. "But it has happened—don't rub it in, Gareth. We have now to make the best of it."

"I know," said he, shortly.

"Gareth," said she, after awhile. "Do you know, we never even shook hands?"

"I know," he repeated gruffly.

"Would it be very terribly wrong if you stopped under that tree for a few minutes and took a grain of dust out of my eye. It pricks so!"

Gareth applied the brakes despairingly. He knew that his powers of resistance were dwindling rapidly under the allure of her voice and the memories it evoked.

After a minute or so spent in futile search for a grain of dust invisible to him, or which had never been there, he ceased to look for it and allowed his hands to drop on her slender shoulders while he

gazed and gazed his fill into the violet depths, his heart thundering in his ears.

"Why did you come, Lynette?" he moaned.

"Why do I love you so!" she replied, lifting her mouth to his.

Mad moments sped while she lay crushed to his breast; then a return of sanity to Gareth, which made him set her back in her seat and take the wheel again, his face darkly flushed and a look of shame in his eyes.

"I suppose this had to be," he said, as he put the car in motion. "But it must never happen again."

"No," said she, falteringly, while her eyes shone with the lustre of triumph. "It need never happen again!"

CHAPTER XVIII

BREWING TROUBLE

By the time the car drove up to the steps of the verandah at Gungaserai it was dusk, but not too dark for Mousie to see that Mrs. Oathwait was a very pretty woman with a complexion of wild roses and hair like burnished copper. Nature assisted by art, in her case, made an amazing picture, so that Mousie stared almost forgetting all her good manners. She could only gaze at the deep violet eyes so thickly lashed and full of allure, and suffer a sinking of the heart. How could men resist a woman like that if she chose to captivate? Bob had told her that Thelma was a flirt! Just for a moment, it was a comfort to know that Gareth's affections had already been captured, for no one could love two people at the same time.

"Let me take you to your room," said she, when she had recovered her wits. "It is only a bungalow, so you will have to make allowances."

"I think it is the most picturesque of its kind I have known!" exclaimed the stranger. "The colour of the thatch, the old garden, the tropical foliage! all make one feel quite romantic! And you have the river!" She ran to the window and looked out on the wide river low between its banks, and full of sandy *churs,** to the dim outline of the opposite shore wrapped in the gathering gloom. "I love that melancholy sound of waves murmuring—always murmuring—never ceasing! Don't you imagine

* Exposed sandbanks

yourself at home, by the sea? I should wake in the mornings expecting to pick up my bathing dress and run out for a swim."

"To me, India is too real for anyone to imagine it is any other place," said Mousie. "It is all things to all people, and hides so much tragedy, if one only knew it!"

Thelma Oathwait shuddered. "I think I have felt more than my share of the tragedy." She moved about, settling her baggage as the servants carried it in, and when they had gone, sat on the edge of the bed and made conversation, Mousie standing by, still overcome with surprise and admiration. "Did Bob ever tell you about—our life together?"

"He is not confidential," said Mousie tactfully.

"But you knew that we never got on?"

"Yes—everyone who knew him, knew that."

"I suppose they blamed me! We women have to bear the brunt if we find it impossible to live as our husbands expect. Think of me, dear Mrs. Wynstay—young, and full of energy, and forced to live in a tent on a sandbank, or in a jungle, month after month! It made me positively ill. I had to get to a station, then to Calcutta. Oh, it was dreadfully hard! Unsympathetic people seemed to think it was my duty to bury myself alive just because my husband, an engineer, was posted to outlandish places!" She shuddered. "It would have driven me insane. Men are so different. They don't seem to mind. They take up hobbies and find entertainment in their work. But what could I do—I ask you?"

"It all depends, of course——"

"Just so. It depended entirely upon temperament. His and mine are so unlike. I have to have society. I could not exist without life about me."

"What sort of passage had you?" Mousie asked, to change the subject.

"Perfectly glorious. We had such fun on the

ship! There were a lot of boys coming out to their regiments and they made things fairly hum. I must say, I had a topping time!" Her lovely eyes smiled reminiscently, and Mousie felt sure that she must have had a great deal of admiration.

"I can quite believe it. I suppose they were all frightfully in love with you?" (It did not seem to matter in these days if women were married or single, they managed to have lovers all the same, innocently or otherwise. Therefore, Mousie was inclined to be satirical.)

Thelma, however, was flattered and drooped her long lashes self-consciously. "Boys are so foolish! I must say, it spoils one for a quiet life. For instance, I could never imagine living like you do in such a quiet place. I did not see a single European as I came along the station roads—nor were there bungalows, when I come to think of it."

"Because we have no near neighbours. The nearest is Mr. Peter Riley, who lives across the river, miles inland. It is quite an undertaking when he wants to visit us, though I must say, he manages to do it frequently."

"He can't have much to do."

"He seems fairly idle."

"But how terrible!—no English neighbours! How *ever* do you pass the time?"

"I find my time very fully occupied. Housekeeping, needlework, reading, letters fill up a day. Then my husband wants companionship when he is home from the courts—not that there is much to do, but we golf sometimes, or take the dogs for a run."

"What a crowd of dogs! They overpower one the way they jump about. I shall be terrified lest they spoil my clothes."

"We shall have to check them. So far, they have done as they pleased, for they regard this as Liberty Hall."

"I am very fond of animals, but I must say I like them kept in their place."

"With dog-lovers, the difficulty is to draw the line. Where is 'their place'? Gareth says it is with us whom they love more than their own kind. They have feelings liable to be hurt, like ours, and are ready to give their lives for us. Few human beings do that! When they do, they redeem themselves."

"I see you are a real dog-lover?"

"I never really understood them till I married, and Gareth showed me what a big part they play in our lives."

"I do congratulate you on 'Gareth.' I suppose I might call him so, since he and Bob were pals? He is splendid. I don't think I have seen anyone so fine in looks and physique for ages. Bob was also considered a big man, but his temperament and mine could not agree. Besides—oh, well, it's a long story. I hear that he is indisposed? Gareth told me in the car."

"So I believe. Or he would have met you at the junction. When do you think of seeing him?"

"I suppose I should go to him since he can't come to me? It is really his duty to come, isn't it? seeing that we have not met for years! But, if he is ill or not up to the mark, I had better go to-morrow morning. Is it very far?"

Mousie explained that it was on the boundaries of the district, but easily accessible by car. "The mechanic will drive you there if you like. I don't know if Gareth will be free."

"You are very kind and sweet to me, dear Mrs. Wynstay! It was lovely of you to ask me to stay."

Do what she would, Mousie could not feel at ease with Bob Oathwait's wife. A feeling of antagonism towards her, for the life she had led her husband, made her unable to show any responsiveness, so that her little air of reserve did not help towards intimacy.

After Mrs. Oathwait had refreshed herself and tidied for dinner, the two ladies sat in the verandah discussing India and its drawbacks. Mrs. Oathwait showed herself a mass of nerves at the sight of insects flying round the lamps, and the possibility of snakes lurking in hidden places. She tucked her skirts round her knees and put her feet up on the bar of another chair while her eyes peered into shadows with suspicion.

"This is what kills me in these country places. You never know where a snake might not be hiding!" she said, in distress. "How do you stand it?"

"I could stand anything that the man I love has to bear," said Mousie. "It depends upon how much you care for the man you have married."

"I suppose that's it! Where is Gareth? for if he isn't likely to overhear, I could speak more freely—though, I dare say, you tell him everything."

"I always do."

"I don't mind, only it is embarrassing to speak if he is listening."

"He is in his den, writing. Nowadays, he does a lot of his office work at home, and he is beginning journalism again."

"He is very clever! I believe you knew him long before you married?"

"Yes. We were great friends, and when my parents died, it seemed natural for us to marry."

Thelma watched her curiously.

"I wonder if I am right? He strikes me as rather a cold nature. And as a lover, rather chilly! Bob was a firebrand and I really thought he would have beaten me at times. Of course I was rather a difficult wife!"

"Gareth is not cold by any means. We are not what you would call passionate lovers, but still waters run deep. We agree splendidly."

Thelma had heard all she wanted to know and

laughed softly. "It must have been terrible losing your parents, but *great* to marry someone you have known for years. I guess Gareth must have been very sympathetic towards you, having known you so long."

Mousie did not reply as she suspected an impertinence.

"Why I asked if he could overhear our conversation was because of a confidence I wanted to make which it would embarrass me to talk of before a man. It is this. Bob and I separated almost immediately after the honeymoon, when I discovered to my despair that he should never have married at all. It was criminal, and I thanked God on my knees that there was no child of the marriage. You see, he has consumption in his family—his father having died of it, also his two brothers, and his sister being now in a sanitorium! But these facts he hid effectually from me till after I was his wife and it was too late to untie the knot. Can you imagine what I went through? It was too dreadful for words. A putrid heritage! I knew that I must never be a mother, yet I longed to have a child. So we lived apart. I, in a station, and he, on his works, seeing each other only occasionally."

"But—there *was* a child—surely?" asked Mousie, astonished.

"I suppose you are terribly old-fashioned? Early Victorian in your ideas, and will be frightfully shocked when I tell you there *was* a child,—not Bob's. It just happened—I suppose it had to happen, for—the man—I need not name him—was mad about me and I saw too much of him. When the child was coming, Bob and I came to an understanding about it. Because he had deceived me, he consented not to divorce me. Of course, if he had exposed me to the shame of a court case, I should have given the whole story to the world,—his cheating me!—and it would have been so like

washing one's dirty linen in public! So I went home and gossip died down because Bob accepted the situation. I have told no one of this before, but I don't mind your knowing, or your telling Gareth. Men are broadminded, and I do want you both to know the truth of my desertion of Bob. People tried to make out that I was gay and flirtatious, and preferred my pleasures to anything. But it was not true. It was only that I would not take the risk of getting a child, some day, with Bob for its father. You can't blame me about the child or my hiding the truth concerning its birth. Society is so down on women who are found out. It is our hypocrisy as a nation. You would be surprised if you knew the number of women passing as virtuous and above reproach in English society who are 'kept' by their lovers. In some cases, the husbands deliberately shut their eyes to the facts as they get greater freedom thereby."

"Oh, don't!" cried Mousie. "It makes me sick!" Her heart beat irregularly with fright at the thought that such a woman should be under her roof—her invited guest! By her own confession, Thelma Oathwait was without virtue and a conscience, and it frightened Mousie to think that Gareth would be exposed to her spells. It is a notorious fact that humanity is more easily influenced towards evil than good; that it does not need too much persuasion to lead people astray. Again, she tried to take comfort in the thought that Gareth should be immune from Thelma's fascinations, for his heart was wrapped up in that other love which was now no longer in his life.

"It all depends on how you view life," said Thelma. "It is not what it was twenty years ago, and very soon there will be a perfect equality of the sexes in all matters—even sexual freedom, which has been hitherto the sole privilege of man."

"God forbid!" cried Mousie with a shudder.

"My father used to say men were more depraved than women because they thought a man was not a man, unless he had defiled himself thoroughly—though they never think of putting it in that light!—so I say, God forbid that a woman should become equally debased. Fortunately, there are exceptions to the rule," Mousie added, thinking of Gareth who was her god.

"You are quite right. I hold no brief for evil courses," cried Mrs. Oathwait. "But I firmly believe the time is passing for the world to be so down on the women who fall. It has always shown great leniency towards men in a like case, and that has been so unfair. Men themselves are beginning to realise it, and are infinitely more broadminded than they used to be. The law of marriage will have to be revised, as also the law relating to divorce. The world is advancing, and there must be more sympathy shown towards unhappy couples who can be happy if allowed to reshape their lives. There would be less sin——"

"What do you call sin? There would be greater sin, to my way of thinking," said Mousie. "For there will be great jealousies—in fact, an increase of crime because of the freedom to cast aside obligations. It is as bad as believing in free love."

"With modifications—perhaps! I don't believe in two people living together when they have ceased to desire each other. And why should they be debarred from choosing new mates?"

"It would lead to terrible things," said Mousie, repelled by her guest's modern way of thinking. She knew that it was a vogue with some men and women to air these views, but they were distasteful to her to whom marriage was a sacrament. "Human beings would be little removed from the animals. I could see them fighting like dogs! Please don't suggest that humanity should take example from the kennels or the farmyard."

"That is being coarse!" laughed Mrs. Oathwait.

"Nothing is so coarse as the idea of free love. If we would only allow it to do so, marriage, with the blessing of God on the institution, would keep our lives pure, out of the very respect bred for its obligations. I could pity the children born into the world of parents who had abolished the sacred tie of marriage."

Mrs. Oathwait went into a peal of laughter. "I do love these discussions, for I am frankly modern and you are delightfully Victorian!"

Gareth entered at this point looking pale and uninspired, and Mousie wondered, for he could be so charming. Instead of which, he had little or nothing to say and appeared altogether abstracted.

Mousie noticed that Thelma often glanced at him as though trying to catch his eye, but Gareth hardly looked at her. They went through the meal, dully, Thelma making most of the conversation in a breezy, light fashion, and often provoking replies from Gareth which came reluctantly.

"Are you very tired, dear?" Mousie asked him.

"Not particularly." Which his wife thought sounded so churlish with a stranger seated at hand. Besides, what was Thelma thinking of his manners? He could be so entertaining. Her heart twisted with envy of her guest's unusual beauty, and she could not help wondering if Gareth were too blind to notice it. The contrast she herself presented made her unhappy and self-conscious. How dowdy she was next to Mrs. Oathwait, who, in her sleeveless frock, displayed exquisitely-shaped arms and a snowy throat. Mousie's own were as shapely, but hidden beneath a muslin sleeve, while her capable hands, which had never been idle till she came to Gungaserai, were only now recovering from the effects of manual labour. She looked down disconsolately at her thickened knuckles and sighed.

Then her hair! For Gareth's sake she had tried

to grow it, for he had once said in a general way that he thought it foolish for women to wear their hair short when the fashion was adopted by men. Men liked feminine women not effeminate boys! Now she had the misfortune to see Thelma's perfectly shingled head marcelled and puffed over the ears, while her own, she was sure, looked like nothing on earth! too long for a bob and too short to do up successfully. She made up her mind to cut it again without fail. The barber who shaved Gareth should be able to cut it under her instructions. Gareth had certainly liked her shingled head in London. But at Gungaserai there had been no one to trust with the scissors, and the shingle had become a bob.

CHAPTER XIX

AN ESCORT

It was late that night when Mousie made her way to Gareth's den to ask if anything were wrong. He had not retired to rest and sleep and had not been himself all the evening. Was he ill? If he did not look after his health, she would have to do it for him.

Mrs. Oathwait had gone early to her room and was asleep, Mousie supposed, for there was no sound from her room, which was plunged in darkness, so she trod lightly for fear of disturbing the sleeper and entered Gareth's study which opened on the dining-room.

He was not there.

While she was wondering where he could be, he entered from the verandah and frowned at the sight of her. She never remembered to have seen him frown in that way before, and for no fault of hers.

"Why aren't you asleep, Mousie?" he asked crossly. "What is keeping you up?"

"I came to look for you. I was wondering what had happened. You looked tired and should be asleep, yourself."

"I am all right and know how to look after myself. I wish you wouldn't worry so. I have just had a long walk to clear my brain."

"I am very sorry! I can't help worrying if I think you are ill. It is nothing to get angry about."

"I am not angry," he replied impatiently. "But when a fellow has a bit of a headache and heaps of

things on his mind, it isn't pleasant to be nagged at."

"Gareth!" Mousie was hurt.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but please let me alone. If my erratic habits are going to upset you, I had better have my bed made up in another room."

Mousie was too hurt to parley any more. Gareth had never before spoken to her in this way, which argued that something was badly on his nerves. What could it be? With tears dropping down her cheeks, she did her best to understand what had so suddenly gone wrong, and could not help coming to the conclusion that it was probably his annoyance at having a stranger as a permanent guest. But she was so beautiful! Generally, a thing of beauty was a joy for ever. How could he hate the thought of having to entertain a lovely woman. It wasn't human. If he would only open his mind to her, she would not need to worry like this. But how could he use that tone to her. It hurt as much as a blow with a fist.

However, when he came to bed a while later, being still awake, she tried to show her magnanimity by avoiding reproaches and treating him as though nothing had happened. As it might interest him, she related Thelma's story of her treatment of Bob and all that followed, and was gratified to find that he listened attentively, saying nothing, unless to ask a question for his own further enlightenment.

As the room was dark, she could not read the expression of his face, but she could tell by his voice that his interest was captured.

"It is very terrible, isn't it, Gareth?" she asked, when finished. "The poor child!—how cruel to practise such a deception! He will grow up thinking that Bob is his father. I never knew she was so immoral."

"It's a point of view," was the surprising answer from Gareth, who should have agreed entirely and

condemned. "Far better that the child should not have the handicap of illegitimacy. And you cannot judge Mrs. Oathwait. What do you know of her temptations? 'Judge not that ye be not judged.'"

"But *Bob!*—how dreadful for him!"

"It was rotten his deceiving her. I never knew he had all that bad blood in his family. Beastly swindle to have bound her for life to him, with that handicap. What became of the other fellow?"

"I suppose he dropped out—they all do."

"I wonder!" Gareth's eyes hardened, for in a flash he recalled the young man named Staunton who had met them in the Highlands. There seemed an understanding between them. He was hot and cold with jealousy and suspicion, then laughed, for it was not likely, for he was only a boy, and she must have had a large circle of admirers. It did not follow that she had flirted or been intimate with all. The story of the child and its father gave him a queer sense of repulsion so confused with jealousy that he did not know how much he was affected by hearing the unsavoury story. Did he care so much?—At any rate, it had happened before his time!

"I don't understand how one could condone Mrs. Oathwait's act," said Mousie. "Whatever her misfortune and however great her temptation, one is obliged to respect the moral codes that govern society. Frankly, I don't like Mrs. Oathwait. She is very beautiful, I grant, but she is not a good woman."

"There you are again! Commend me to virtuous women for narrow-mindedness. At any rate, the story was told to you in confidence. Mrs. Oathwait moves in good society. No one points the finger of scorn at her, so the sooner you forget her past, the better. There are few women of the world that can say they have an unblemished past—while I doubt if there are any men at all who could say it

truthfully!" Upon that, he turned over as if to say, "I'm going to sleep. Don't talk."

Mousie waited to hear him say "Good-night," which was the habit of months, but he had evidently forgotten it in the argument, so she too said nothing and wooed sleep, still suffering from wounded feelings.

Gareth was only half aware of his cruelty when he caused his belongings to be shifted into another room so as not to disturb Mousie by his irregular habits. He knew he would have restless nights and keep late hours in order to fight down the devil of desire that was coming to life again within him for Thelma's embraces and Thelma's loveliness. He could not lie beside his wife with a clear conscience, knowing that he was weakening in spite of himself and might yet be capable of unfaithfulness. He was very sorry for Mousie, but his affair with Lynette was unforgettable, and his baser instincts craved for a renewal of the former old relations. It was kismet that she should have returned to him and under such intimate conditions; if need be, he was willing to confess the whole truth to Mousie and leave the issue with her. Bob Oathwait could not live long, and, presently, it would only be Mousie who would be holding him apart from his true mate. Poor Mousie!—but she was a real sport, and would never stand in the way of his happiness. He could so easily fake a reason for divorce which would not injure Thelma's good name which she had managed to preserve through all the vicissitudes of her married life. Mousie could already claim technical cruelty, for he so often neglected her need of him, and the love that was her right. But for his obsession for Thelma Oathwait, whom he called Lynette, he might have been ashamed and penitent. But there was no room in his mind for repentence though his wife's goodness to him had heaped coals of fire on his head.

After breakfast, at which he had been very silent

and moody, he offered to drive Thelma to Talbegan in his car, thereby taking both his hearers by surprise. Mousie thought the guest could so easily have been driven there by the mechanic, so that Gareth could have attended to his official duties. Her look of protest at him was, however, lost, for he would not meet her eye. Thelma accepted his offer gratefully, and he left the table to give his orders for the car, while Mousie had to listen to the guest's pæons of joy at the prospect of not having to ride beside a native mechanic.

"You are so sweet to spare him!" she cried. "It will make all the difference to the long ride."

When Gareth came in, he remarked to Mousie, with a guilty conscience, in passing, while Thelma retired to put on her hat, "It is just as well for her to have a man with her in case Bob is the worse for drink. You never know, you know."

Mousie made no reply, her silence showing her intense disapproval; nor could she have spoken while a lump in her throat threatened to choke her. Never had she acted hysterically in her life. She was only now learning how a passion of jealous despair could rend her heart and break her nerve. Something in the way Gareth avoided Thelma's eye was alarming. It was so much like trying to hide his longing to be alone with her so that there should be no bar to his meeting her eyes without need for reserve.

Again,—she had grown suspicious because of the way Thelma had acted. Once at breakfast, the talk between her and Gareth seemed to pass over Mousie's head. An allusion to the scenery at Naini Tal made Mrs. Oathwait say—"I am sure, if I go there it will remind me of Craigmanan," and the tender look she shot across at him from under her eyelashes made Mousie hold her breath.

"Craigmanan!" repeated Gareth with a sudden intake of his breath. "I wonder if it could be anything so lovely!" Then silence fell suddenly

between them, as though they had both realised that they might be giving something away.

There was undoubtedly something suspicious there, and Mousie's peace of mind was utterly destroyed. Then had followed the offer to escort Thelma, and Mousie felt helpless before the advance of the inevitable.

Nevertheless, she nerved herself to the effort of speeding them on their way, standing with a sickly smile on her lips while Gareth made the lovely Mrs. Oathwait comfortable in the car and stepped in past her to the seat at the wheel. Mrs. Oathwait waved a gossamer handkerchief and Gareth raised his cap, as the car shot forwards and ran out of the grounds to the road beyond.

"Do you think he was really ill, Gareth?" said Thelma, as they turned into a country road. "Or was it just that he did not want to meet me?"

"Both, I believe. He has been drinking hard, you must know, and that is bad for the nerves—also, it might make him feel ill."

"Oh, I hope we shall not find him the worse for drink! If there is one thing I fear, it is a drunken man!"

"You have me with you. Bob is going the way to kill himself and no one can stop him now—not even the knowledge that he can't live long."

Thelma shuddered, then slipped a small ungloved hand along till it rested on Gareth's knee. The next instant, his had descended from the wheel till it was covering hers, leaving his right hand to guide the car. They ran along the country road which was bordered on either hand by cane brake and groups of mango trees. Occasionally they passed a bullock cart toiling on its way with a sleepy driver indifferent to time. Otherwise, they saw no one.

"You don't condemn me, do you, Gareth?—for being extravagant and ruining Bob?" She lifted two lovely eyes to his, glistening with tears. "I

did not know. He never told me he could not send the money, and life was so terribly blank to me. I wanted so to forget—Craigmanan."

"How could I ever blame you when I love you so?" He asked her brokenly. "I tried to forget, too—and married."

"But you did not succeed! Oh, I am glad you did not succeed!"

"No. I now long and long to live over those wonderful days. Do you think it will ever be possible?"

"If—he dies, it could be done. We would then marry, Gareth. She would give you up. She must! Oh, how I hate her! I cannot help it, but every time you call her 'Mousie,' I loathe her."

Gareth winced, for somehow he did not like hearing her speak against Mousie. "She is a good sort. You don't know her, Lynette."

"She is a prig. One of the worst I have met! I hate her smug little face with its turned up nose and critical eyes!"

"Come now! Mousie has a sweet face—something intensely honest there. You know exactly where you are with her, and can bank——"

"Don't! I won't hear you praise her! You'll have to get quit of her when we find we can marry."

"Why not let us do the square thing and stand to our guns? Let us own up to Bob——"

"Gareth!—how can you!—Think of all they will drag into open court! Did she tell you what I told her last night about—the child?"

"Yes. She tells me everything."

"And still you love me?"

"I suppose I have gone past helping that. I love you in spite of what she told me."

"Then—let us wait—you say Bob is dying——"

Gareth wished she would not harp on that, and to make a diversion, raised her hand to his lips. "This

little hand! I never thought to hold it in mine again!"

Yet, he was conscious that he did not experience the same rush of wild emotion at the contact. It was terribly true that nothing ever remains the same. Time is inexorable. The romance had faded, the glamour had been left behind in Scotland—all that remained was crude desire. He wanted her though he knew she was no longer his ideal woman.

The thought that spoilt his appreciation of the moment was Bob's ignorance of the situation. Bob loved and trusted him and was deceived. It was a queer world! thought Gareth as he restored Thelma's hand and concentrated his attention on the road.

"Who was that rider?" asked Thelma, curiously.

"A rider? I did not see him."

"He came out of a thicket as we passed and rode the way we have come."

"I wonder? It might have been Peter Riley—it couldn't surely be anyone else! Could he have seen us?"

"I hope not!"

. . . . . .

In the meantime, Mousie went about her household duties with a heavy heart. With the coming of Mrs. Oathwait, things were going steadily wrong and she was filled with anxiety and distress. What evil fate had prompted her to ask the woman to be her guest? It made her wonder if the devil had more to do with human affairs than the Almighty, for surely He could have foreseen what was likely to happen, and have prevented the catastrophe.

She then scolded herself for letting imagination run away with her to the point of injustice. She would try to keep a brave face and not cross her bridges needlessly. Gareth was impatient and queer, very possibly because he disliked having anyone to stay—yet he need not have driven her to Talbegan! That was inexplicable.

As if to furnish a distraction, Mr. DeMello entered the gate and walked dejectedly to the house. Mousie thought he was looking wretched, and wondered what was wrong.

"I hope your wife is not ill?" she asked him on shaking hands. It was a very unusual circumstance for either of the DeMellos to call.

"It is about my wife, I have come," said he nervously. "I have been wanting to consult you and take your advice if you will be good enough to give it to me, Mrs. Wynstay. I am desperately worried."

CHAPTER XX

THE MISCHIEF MAKER

MOUSIE led him into the drawing-room, immediately sympathetic. Something unusual must have happened to make him look so upset.

"I hope she isn't ill?"

"Oh, no. Nothing like that. I hardly like to speak, but I am at a loss what to do. She is so changed. You remember how bright and happy she was? We were not well off, still she managed to carry on and hope for better times. Now all is different. She hardly talks and mopes by the hour —and I cannot help dating it from the time she started to go on the river for joy-rides with Mr. Riley in his motor boat."

"Has she been more than once, after you dined here?"

"My God!—yes. I have lost count, and for hours at a time! neglecting her home. The last time he called and took her out, I had tried to make her refuse, but she went in spite of my advice to the contrary. 'What will people say?' I said. 'Who cares what the natives say!' she replied, 'and there is no one else that is likely to bother.' Then she stayed out so late, I was that worried, I did not know what to do. I all but came to see you and take your advice, but she came back long after dark, saying the boat stuck on a *chur,* and they could not get off till some fishermen came and shifted them. Now I ask you, is that the way to carry on? If I was a

bigger man, I'd muck up that fine gentleman's face for him, but he's got the advantage over me and I am obliged to put up with ways that no husband with self-respect will endure. If this goes on I'll have to write to his wife."

"You wouldn't surely do that!" cried Mousie. "It is just what she would like, for she might make those outings grounds for a divorce."

"A jolly good thing, too. It might put an end to the affair. I want my wife to be let alone, like before. I have no use for gentlemen chasing about after her and turning her head with their foolish talk when there is nothing serious in it. She'll soon find out when he is divorced on her account, that he won't ask her to marry him if I am willing to give her up! Not his sort. I know their like!"

"But the disgrace!" murmured Mousie.

"It won't trouble me. I will get her back and she will profit by the lesson, otherwise, Mrs. Wynstay, my life is becoming a hell. She has turned against me, her own husband who has been faithful to her and thinks of no woman but her. She has nothing to say to me and only brightens up when he writes or comes. I should like to know what he writes about anyway," DeMello brooded gloomily. "The last few days he has not come nor written and she is as bad-tempered as a vixen."

"What do you wish me to do, Mr. DeMello?"

"If you would be so good as to speak to her—or to him? He is your friend. I shall be on my knees with gratitude, Madam."

Mousie promised to do her best, and while DeMello was at work, walked round to his bungalow to see his wife.

Elvira DeMello was seated in the verandah of her dwelling when Mousie called, apparently doing nothing but watching the gate, and the look of disappointment and sullenness on her childish face was a revelation.

"Sit down, Mrs. Vynstā'," she said, in her staccato tones. "It is nice of you to come. I hear you have a ladee visitor and that she is veree prettee. My! I vould like to see her."

"Perhaps you will have the chance, as she has come to stay for some time. She is Mr. Oathwait's wife."

"I suppose she has heaps of admirers? Vot a thing it is to be so prettee!" sighed Elvira DeMello. "Has—has Mr. Riley seen her?" The question was put in deep embarrassment and self-consciousness, which told its own story.

"Not yet. We haven't seen Mr. Riley for some days. He has not been to see us as often as he used to, awhile back. Have you enjoyed your motor trips on the river?"

Mrs. DeMello coloured under her dark skin and tossed her head pettishly. "He hasn't been since that time we got stuck on a sandbank and came home near midnight. Perhaps you have been telling him off?"

"I? I never knew anything about it. What happened? Besides, it is no business of mine what my neighbours do even if I disapprove," said Mousie. "I am glad you mentioned it, for I think that it is going a bit far, don't you? He should have known better than to have risked such a thing happening. He has his wife, and you your husband to consider."

"His not even writing, made me think that, perhaps, he had been put off taking me out," Elvira said, suspiciously. "I don't blame him for not worrying about his wife—she's asking for it by living in England while he is left lonely here. As for me, I am fed up with the life in these quiet stations. Nothing to do from morning till night but slave after a man who hasn't it in him to get on!"

"I don't think it is fair to blame him," said Mousie. "It isn't any business of mine and I don't

want to meddle, but being fed up with your circumstances and trying to find happiness outside your own home, has never done any good. Mr. Riley is a man of the world and you a mere child. Don't attach any importance to the things he says or the interest he has shown in you. Believe me, they don't mean anything. Men love running about with young girls. Men as idle as Mr. Riley are capable of doing a lot of mischief, so take care of yourself."

Mrs. DeMello flushed hotly with resentment and became insulting.

"Keep your adwice till it's asked for! I should think I kno' what I am about, and am as good a judge of character as yourself! You vould like me to believe that Mr. Riley is a blackguard? I refuse to think so! He is a gentleman and you are jealous, that's vot you are! Now I believe you have been putting him against me, for he hasn't written, and he said he vould. It is terrible to expect a letter and day after day go by and none come! He must write. He *must!*——" and she burst into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

"My dear girl," Mousie came to her and laid a hand kindly on her shoulder; but it was shaken off, rudely. "I never knew things were as bad as this! —he has been making love to you! He is even worse than I thought him."

"Oh, get out of this! Between you and Alexander, you are driving me mad! Wot if he has been making love to me? Am I the onlee married woman in India that has a lover? Yes—I love him, I do! No one could help it when he is so good and so unhappy! It serves his wife right!—I don't care if she has lost him. I'll make it up to him, I vill!"

"You foolish girl!" Mousie was appalled, and enraged with Peter Riley for having done such a wicked thing as to have wantonly turned a young girl's head with his falsehoods and mischief. "I

hope it is only a passing infatuation; that you haven't really lost your heart to Mr. Riley, for he has no use for it. He has no use for any girl's honest love. He is never in earnest, as you will find——"

"He is—he *is!*" Elvira broke out desperately, frightened and trembling. "He couldn't have made me care like that—he couldn't, unless he meant to be true to me."

"I want you to trust me and tell me everything," said Mousie, gravely; inwardly anxious and alarmed. "How far has this thing gone?"

"Why should I tell you? You will tell all the world!—though vy should I care?" her eyes streaming, her cheeks wet and scarlet. "It may be wicked to let a man kiss one when one is married, but—I don't care! I vould go to the end of the earth for Peter. He said he would arrange something—he promised to write. If no one interferes, I know he vill. He's a gentleman."

"He's a dishonourable cad!"

"Never! You don't know—he is not that, for—he had heaps of chances to prove that—but—but—he—respected me, though, I tell you, I was that keen on him he could have done anything!" Another flood of tears.

Mousie had found out all she wanted to know and was intensely relieved. So Peter had merely befooled the unsophisticated Eurasian girl for a pastime, and was probably feeling he had gone far enough and meant to drop the one-sided game.

"Listen," said Mousie, and pleaded strongly with the young wife to think of all she was losing by her encouragement of sin and folly. "It is like leaving a safe anchorage for stormy seas, if you leave your good husband for any man who is dishonourable enough to drag you down. It is bound to end in shipwreck. Many have done it, but very few there are who have weathered the storm."

She bade Elvira good-bye and returned home, not

at all convinced that her warnings would have any effect. Little Mrs. DeMello still cast hungry eyes at the gate while crouching dejectedly in her easy chair, and left the house to keep itself. If it looked neglected and the servants robbed and cheated on all sides, she did not care, for she believed she would soon leave her husband for ever for someone so wonderful, that to her he was a god. She had dreamed all her life of being wooed and loved by a tall fair Englishman, who would treat her like a queen and cover her with jewels and fine silks. She would have a car of her own to drive, and when among the snobbish women of his class, she would triumph, saying, "He is mine—my husband!—he chose me out of all the world!" They would all envy her and, in time, treat her with respect, because she was the wife of a splendid Englishman! When convinced that her earlier dreams had led her astray, she had suddenly shown sanity by accepting Alexander DeMello and trying to make him a model wife. She lived in the hope of motherhood, and though deeply disappointed at the loss of her firstborn, would have settled down if she had never met Peter Riley, whose instincts for mischief had been aroused at sight of such easy prey.

Mousie felt, in a measure, to blame for having asked the DeMellos to her Christmas dinner. Gareth had not approved, but he generally yielded to her wishes, so she had made the unfortunate mistake of bringing Peter Riley and Elvira DeMello together. It had not occurred to her that he would have been attracted by an Eurasian, though she should have known that a man who could have kept an Indian woman as a mistress was capable of amusing himself at Elvira's expense.

She walked home, greatly worried and, for the time being, distracted from her own troubles. Peter Riley's guilty conscience had evidently made him keep away of late, leaving the Wynstays to believe

that he was actually busy for the first time in his life. Busy! He had, indeed, been busy, doing the devil's work, thought Mousie.

When she arrived home, the first person she saw was the sinner himself, standing on the steps of her verandah to welcome her return.

"Why this coldness?" he asked, assuming innocence when she refused to shake hands. Nevertheless, she allowed him to follow her to the drawing-room that she might "have it out."

They had it out in earnest, Mousie letting Peter Riley understand that she had no further use for him as a friend. "It was a wicked thing to do. A cruel thing! You knew all the while that she was taking you seriously. Oh, men like you are best dead!"

"Phew! that's putting it strongly. But give me some credit. Things are not as bad as you imagine. I admit folly, but nothing worse. She'll forget all about it when she realises that I've cried off, and 'Alick' will come again into his own."

"How can you be so heartless!" Mousie had no words to express her disgust.

"I wonder if I am? In a matter of this sort, I appear to be, for my heart is not touched. But what do you know of the depth and strength of my feelings when it is a case of real love? For instance, I have been in hell over a woman for some time, only she doesn't know it."

It was impossible to mistake his meaning, but Mousie took no notice of it, as she had no faith in his protestations. It was like him to make the most of every opportunity he had with women, to deceive and befool them.

"I commend your self-restraint," was all she vouchsafed. "Am I to believe that you are going to leave Mrs. DeMello alone?"

Peter made the sign of the cross and carried a

finger across his throat from ear to ear. "Honest to God!"

"Do you mean to tell her that it is all off?"

"No. I am too great a coward for that. If she's not a fool, she will guess it by my silence. There is no need for the crossing of t's and dotting of i's in a case like this. Let her discover for herself what a wicked world it is, and that the surest way of putting a fellow off is to throw herself at his head. If she hadn't been such poor sport, I don't guarantee that matters might not have gone very far, for it isn't good for a fellow to be at a loose end like myself. If only someone I am crazy about was a little kind to me, I believe that I would be a different being. There would be someone to live for—someone to *live up to,*" he concluded impressively.

"I would pity the girl who undertook your regeneration. It would be heart breaking."

"You are very cruel to me, Elizabeth."

"*Mrs. Wynstay,* to you, please," said Mousie unperturbed.

"No. I couldn't say it. I will say nothing, rather. I don't understand you. I mean it, sincerely. Any other girl in your place would have given up trying to impress a man who isn't worthy of her thumb nail. But you——"

Mousie rose indignantly. "That will do. I don't wish you to come here any more, Mr. Riley. You insult me by——"

"Wait a bit," said he, flushing hotly, his eyes dogged, his face twitching. "I have ocular evidence that there is something behind his peculiar insensibility towards yourself. Will you hear what I have to say?"

He looked so desperately in earnest, that Mousie relaxed and showed her willingness to listen by waiting on his words. Inwardly, her heart thumped violently. What was she going to hear?

"I came up the road just now from a village lower

down, where I had a little business with an Indian landowner. I was riding, and met a car approaching me driven rather erratically, so I moved off the road among a clump of trees to let them go by as my nag isn't fond of cars and sometimes plays the devil. I thought, perhaps, that it was you with Gareth, but it proved to be Mrs. Oathwait—for so I guessed, as she was expected. The car flashed by, the occupants too much absorbed in each other to see me, but I saw them very clearly, and that flash was enough to tell that they were holding hands. The erratic driving being due to the fact that your husband had one hand on the wheel and was most of the time looking into Mrs. Oathwait's face. I don't deny that it repays scrutiny, but——" He shrugged his shoulders. "I could have brained him when I thought of—you! You loving, patient, adorable woman!"

Mousie felt turned to stone. For her life, she could not have helped giving away to Peter the terrible shock it was to hear such news.

"Are you lying to me?" Her eyes searched his despairingly.

"Before God, it's the truth."

She sank into a chair and covered her face with her quivering hands, feeling faint and sick. How could it be true, when Gareth had met Thelma for the first time yesterday? It was inconceivable that he could be in love with her all in a moment, though there was such a thing as love at first sight. But Gareth wasn't the sort of man to fall to a new face because it was beautiful, when he was already in love. What was she to think?

"I—don't understand—how could he, when he has just got to know her?" she asked, lifting her pallid face to Peter's.

"Are you sure? Is this the first time they have met?"

"I know it is . . . at least, I—believe so."

Suddenly like an inspiration, came the memory of words he had spoken to her long ago—it seemed so very long ago, but was, in reality, only some months, when he had asked her to marry him——

"It is just that I am down and out. I love someone so utterly, so madly,—someone who has quite gone out of my life, that it is very unlikely there will be anyone I shall want to love in that way again. It feels rotten having to tell you this when I am asking you to be my wife, but it is as well that there should be no misunderstandings or regrets, afterwards. . . ." Then, another time—"It happened to turn out that she was married." Then again, when Mousie had excused the girl's conduct on the grounds that she couldn't have known her husband was living—— "No, she knew all the time that he was living."

Married!—Could he have fallen in love with . . . ?

Mousie moaned and rocked herself in her anguish. Gareth had never met Thelma Oathwait in India! Was it possible that she had met him under another name, and so wilfully deceived him?

But these were only surmises. She would ask Gareth for the truth when he returned and know exactly where she stood. He would never lie to her. She hoped with all her heart that it was all a flight of her own imagination. It was quite possible that he had been led, that morning, into a flirtation with Mrs. Oathwait who was beautiful, and a flirt. Mousie prayed that it would prove to be the case. She would not say that Peter had told her anything, but would know that he had been lying, or that Gareth had been flirting, if the latter denied all previous acquaintance with Thelma Oathwait.

"I—I am so sorry I have behaved with such weakness," Mousie said, recovering her self-control with an effort. "If what you have told me is true, it was cruel and mean of you to speak at all. It would have

been more admirable if you had kept what you had seen on the road to yourself. It simply makes it impossible for us to continue friends. Will you go, Mr. Riley?"

"Do you mean that?" Riley asked growing rigid.

"I do." She turned her face aside and pointed to the door.

He looked long at her, the colour ebbing slowly from his face, then moved towards the threshold. Just before leaving the room, he stopped and said quietly, "This is to-day. To-morrow, should you need me, I am ready."

Mousie could settle to nothing when Peter Riley had gone. There was nothing she could do that could keep her from thinking, so she wandered about, then stood for some time watching the little motor boat, guided by Riley, cross the river. It was a wide crossing and the course irregular owing to the sand-banks which had appeared interrupting the direct passage and diverting the currents of the stream.

She did not know what to make of him, but was willing to concede the fact that he was peculiarly attractive. Yet, how untrustworthy and despicable! There was surely something to be said on his wife's side to excuse the break she had made?

For the first time, Gareth's dogs were more to her than friends. They had rewarded her tolerance with love, and now nestled to her comfortingly, as much as to say, the whole world might fail you, but we, never! They seemed to sense her distress and forced their loving attentions on her. One in particular, insisted upon sitting in her lap,—a great over-grown Irish terrier,—and adoring her with dumb looks of devotion. "Never mind," he seemed to say. "It all feels very dreadful just now, but nothing lasts. Even troubles pass away. Be patient, that's all, and make allowances. But never give up caring,—like ourselves, no matter how sore at heart and disappointed! —just keep on, always loving. You'll win through."

"What am I to do!—oh, what am I to do, if it is Thelma he has always loved?" she cried in anguish clasping Gareth's pet to her gratefully. How loving dogs are!—how responsive to kindness! faithful and devoted to their human masters! thought she.

If Gareth loved Thelma—if Thelma was the woman who had stolen his heart by lying and deceiving him, a time would surely come when his infatuation for her would die down like all effervescing emotion, and leave him sane and capable of using his normal judgment. Would he not then condemn her utterly for the dishonourable part she had played in the lives of at least two men—for the great wrong she had done an innocent child—for everything in her that was the negation of goodness and virtue?

Waves of jealous passion burned within Mousie.

The thought that Peter Riley was speaking the truth was like vitriol poured on her loving heart.

Her only hope was that he had been lying. Oh, that it might prove a lie. However, she would know when Gareth came home; for whatever happened, Gareth would not lie to her!

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHANTY

GARETH drove Thelma to Talbegan, his soul in revolt against everything that stood between his Lynette and himself. By rights, he should have been ashamed to face Bob with the knowledge of all that was making him a traitor to his friend, but strangely enough, with his passion for Bob's wife, he had lost the power to judge his own conduct. Right and wrong were of no account in the craving to restore the relations she had snapped so ruthlessly. He did not blame her—or blaming, forgave her, for she was a mother and what will not a mother do to protect her child!

Presently, they would arrive in Bob's presence, and Gareth shrank from the half conscious hope that he would find his friend worse. He had no right to live on, a stumbling block in the way of his wife's happiness. He was dishonourable to have married her. Far better if he died!

"Gareth—what can we do, you and I?" Lynette asked him as they approached Talbegan by the Ganges. "We cannot live without each other!"

"No," said he. "Should we tell Bob?"

"And make a big scandal! Oh, Gareth!—my child will grow up to despise its mother!"

"You will have to be prepared for sacrifices."

"Perhaps by the time he is a man, the world will

have a very different outlook! But I am such a coward of publicity! Why need we tell him anything? Do you not love me enough to keep our secret?"

"I love you better than life. But I could not cheat Mousie. She must be told—and Bob. Otherwise, there will always be the fly in the ointment—our happiness ruined by the knowledge that we are guilty of treachery. If there was no one to consider but your child, it would have been different. I think I must tell them both."

"Oh, Gareth!"

"It will be best in the end."

"I should hate the position! The world will treat me badly!"

"The world has a short memory. Darling, we cannot go on in this way. We have got to find a way of marrying, and then, we can defy people. My only regret is—poor Mousie. She has been an angel to me."

"But, since you do not love her, she loses nothing!"

"She has no money. I cannot bear to think of what will become of her, for she will never let me provide for her! She has too much pride—besides—it will be a bad blow to her, she is very fond of me."

"Gareth!—I won't have you think of her or anyone else but me!" pouted Lynette.

"Dearest, it is in quite a different way. Then—it is decided?"

"If you insist. Once we are married, I suppose the world will forget the scandal."

"We will live it down."

They talked the subject threadbare by the time they arrived at Bob Oathwait's bungalow, and Lynette was introduced to the mode of his life in that dreary spot.

The bungalow in all its shabbiness, stood on sandy soil not far from the river bank and within sight of the factories the Government wanted protected from

the ravages of the devouring Ganges, with groups of palm trees between, justifying the name of the site.* There was nothing picturesque in the grey, straggling bazaar on one hand and the factories on the other with the fallen river and long reaches of bare, yellow sand stretching away into mid channel where the current now ran strong.

Lynette looked around her as she stepped from the machine and shuddered. "Could any woman live in such a place?"

"It isn't inviting," said Gareth, a flash of intuition convincing him that one woman would have made even that spot home for her husband and asked for nothing better. But then, Mousie was unique!

"Worse and worse!" said Lynette as she entered the verandah where the flooring of masonry was cracked and broken, and the camp chairs were weather-beaten and rickety. The living-room had no ceiling cloth, patches of damp stained the whitewashed walls. A *punkah* with a frill of grass matting hung motionless from a beam, cobwebs festooned the ropes with which it was suspended. 'Like master, like servants.' Bob's servants did not trouble to keep the bungalow clean, for the master had ceased to be self-respecting.

"Oh, how he has gone down!" gasped Lynette. "To think of the squalor, and he used, at one time, to be so particular!"

Gareth shut out from his memory the confessions of his friend, for they did not reflect credit on Thelma, his wife. His feeling for Lynette made him wish to wipe out all that had made him angry with and despise her other self, Thelma.

"Where are the servants?" Gareth wondered aloud. Most likely in the kitchen while their master was down by the breakwater. He thought Bob had lied about being ill. The fact was, that he had not

* Talbegan: meaning "Palm garden."

the courage to face his wife being the wreck he was. It was doubtful, if she would recognise him!

Gareth gave a shout of "*Koi hai!*" and a patter of bare feet sounded round the angle of the house, and a slatternly bearer arrived breathless in answer to the summons.

"Where is your Sahib?" Gareth asked.

"In his bedroom, *huzur*," said the man. "With the bolt across the door."

"What?—still?" It was close upon noon.

"What can do?" whined the bearer. "How many times I knocked and he took no notice, like as not he is unconscious with the *sharab*. When he awakes of himself, he will unbolt the door and come out to ask for food."

As Lynette did not understand the language easily, Gareth translated. "It is horrible that he should not have had the self-restraint to have refrained from drinking to excess when he knew you were expected! I'll go and see if he'll let me in."

Gareth knocked repeatedly on the bedroom door and getting no reply, went round the bungalow to a window overlooking the garden and finding the glass closed, tried to get a view of the bed through a tear in the cotton blind. He saw Bob lying on his back, motionless, and by the very stillness and rigidity of the form, began to sense that something was very wrong. Without saying anything to Lynette whom he had left in the living-room, he called a servant who was watching him from a distance, and explained that he intended to break into the room. Implements were immediately forthcoming, and in a little while Gareth climbed in over the sill and went quickly to the bed.

It was as he thought. Bob was dead.

Clutched in his hand was a folded piece of paper, and on the bedside table a phial of laudanum.

Gareth was transfixed with shock and, for the moment, incapable of action. Not so the servant,

who uttering a cry of alarm, fled, crying the news aloud to the rest of the staff.

When Gareth recovered his presence of mind, he touched the body only to find that it was stiff and cold. Bob Oathwait had been dead for hours! He then extracted the paper from the rigid fingers and unfolding it, read:

> "Gareth, dear old friend, forgive me for not "having the courage to come up to scratch. Things "have gone too far to be stopped. I haven't the "wish to live, and see no object in carrying on. My "only regret is that I am owing you quite a lot of "money. Perhaps Thelma will pay it back from "the life-policy and provident fund. It will be up "to her. I did her a great wrong, but she's had "her own back on me a thousand times over. Still, "I owe her no ill will, and hope she will forget her "grudge against me. My only excuse is that I "loved her selfishly and did not think that questions "of heredity matter in these days when there need "never be children of the marriage. But Thelma "could not forgive the deception. She will explain "what happened; I am too tired and the time is "short. The stuff I have taken is beginning to "act. Good-bye, old friend. I think it was a "mistake getting Thelma out. Will you help her "to go back? She will marry again. There will "be lots of fellows eager to take my place and some-"one will make a better job of it than I did. A "thousand thanks for your goodness to me. I am "tempted to wonder why fellows like myself are "born. We start with a handicap, and haven't an "earthly chance of making a success of life. If "there is another world, I hope things will be better "managed and less favouritism shown."

There was no signature.

Gareth stood there, shaking from head to foot from shock, hardly able to take in all he had read. Bob had taken his own life because he had realised that he was beaten by Life. No one had helped him to

fight and win. He had no little pal like Mousie to give him heart.

Mousie. . . ?

What made him think of her when she was soon to be swept out of his path that he might find happiness with Lynette?

He did not want to think of Mousie. The unshaven, waxen face of Bob Oathwait claimed all his mind with strange insistence. A wave of great pity swept through him as he saw in lightning revelation the cruel handicap under which the unhappy fellow had laboured. If he had given up the fight, it was because he had been left to battle alone; and alone, he had felt he had "not an earthly chance" of success. For him there had only been disappointment and bitter loss! Everything had combined to spoil his life. What right had anyone to judge the man!

Meanwhile, there was Thelma (Lynette) waiting in the living-room alone. Had she guessed what had happened? At any rate, he would not need to break the news gently to her.

Gareth unbolted the bedroom door and emerged into her presence, his face ashen.

"What is it?—Gareth!" Lynette's hands flew to her heart.

"He—he is—dead," said Gareth.

"Dead?" Even in the midst of surprise and shock, the relief in her tones could not be hidden. She was free! "How, Gareth?—My God!—is it true?"

Gareth handed her the crumpled letter and sank into a chair, covering his face with his hands. It hurt badly to think that Bob had died believing him his faithful friend. It was too late for confession, now. Or, did he now know all the pitiful story that partly exonerated his friend and dishonoured his wife?

It occurred to Gareth, that Bob's wife would feel

crushed under the load of self-reproach his sudden death had flung upon her, for to the end of her days she must know herself as a cheat and a failure.

Gareth pulled himself up with a jerk, wondering where his thoughts were leading him? Was he criticising his beautiful Lynette while condemning Thelma?

Lynette was not to be judged on the same plane with other women. He loved her and believed in her.

Lynette was also Thelma, who was accountable for the death of a man's soul. Yet Lynette was warm hearted and loving, and had been cruelly deceived. Marriage had not the same meaning to her as to others, and Bob had not been fair to her. Gareth would not judge Lynette however much he had resented Thelma!—though they were the same person.

However badly shocked Bob's wife should have felt, Thelma was in no wise crushed with self-reproach for her treatment of her husband even though he lay cold and dead before her eyes.

She crept into the room followed by Gareth and stood looking calmly at the emaciated face of the dead man.

"How changed!" she whispered, tearless and unmoved. "I should not have known him! He used not to look so gaunt and shrunken!"

"I can hardly believe it is poor old Bob," said Gareth, his features quivering. "To think that only a few days ago we met and discussed your coming, and now——"

"Now he is no more! Death is a terrible thing, Gareth, for it seems such a waste of energy to live at high pressure, physically and mentally, if one has to come to this—just clay, nothing more!" She slipped her hand within Gareth's arm and stood looking down on her dead husband's face fascinated by the thoughts it evoked.

"I couldn't think that," said Gareth, conscious of wishing that Lynette would not treat him with familiarity in the presence of the corpse of the man they had both wronged. In his imagination, he could almost sense the spirit of his friend standing beside the bed, regarding them with reproach. "I could not think that one comes to mere clay in the end. There must be another life. Everything points to that. Poor old Bob will have a better chance there."

Lynette withdrew her hand as though sensing his lack of sympathy, and they left the room together.

"Gareth," she said, outside the door. "You are not thinking me to blame for Bob's state—and suicide?"

"God forbid!" broke from Gareth.

"Then be good to me. Love me and tell me that I could not have acted differently."

"I do love you," said Gareth, "but I can tell you nothing here. Somehow—don't you feel it?—it doesn't seem right to think of ourselves just now."

"I don't feel that at all," said she. "If I had felt in the wrong—ashamed, or repentant, I should now feel sorry and want to rush away. But, you forget. Bob and I were never anything to each other for years—from the moment I learned that I had been deceived. I am not a hypocrite to pretend that I am sorry he has gone, when it is the only decent thing he has done so far." (Except support her more than liberally while they were apart, and starve that she might be fed. The thought flashed in and out of Gareth's mind.)

"I am not blaming you, Lynette for not looking at this from my point of view. It was all a very miserable business, and now I have to inform the police and attend to the matter of his burial."

Servants were peering in at the doorways, workmen and contractors having heard the news, were flocking to the bungalow.

"How I hate all this curiosity!" cried Lynette, shrinking from the gaze of the Indians who swarmed about the verandahs and crowded the steps without. "Don't you think I had better go back? I can do nothing here."

"I think it will be better, dear, if you go back. Can you drive?"

"I know this type of car very well. I can send it back for you by your mechanic."

It was agreed upon as the best plan, and Thelma Oathwait was glad to put the miles between herself and the unpleasant scene.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMPACT

MOUSIE heard the car and ran to her room with a pounding heart believing Gareth had returned with the guest. He was sure to want her for something or another and seek her in her room, for he had learned to depend on her for everything in the domestic way; and it would then be her opportunity to speak.

However, it was Mrs. Oathwait and not Gareth, she discovered, when she was called at her bedroom door in agitated tones to hear the terrible thing that had happened.

"Oh, Mrs. Wynstay," cried the guest, "your husband has stayed back and I have returned alone. A terrible thing has occurred! It is too awful for words! and I am afraid it will look so strange in the eyes of the world!—and just on my return from home—oh, dear! Do let me see you."

Mousie ran out full of nervous apprehension. What had happened that could be called "terrible"? Was it an accident to Gareth?

"Gareth?—is he hurt?"

"He is all right—it is Bob. He's dead, Mrs. Wynstay!—killed himself!—isn't it too awful?"

Mousie sank down on a seat, her knees suddenly refusing to support her. "Tell me all," she said, fearfully.

Mrs. Oathwait entered into particulars, excited but unemotional. Bob was dead. She firmly believed

that he had gone out of his mind at the last—suicide was generally committed while under a condition of temporary insanity, wasn't that so?—otherwise it was so unaccountable that he should have done it just when he was expecting her to visit him!

"You see me dry-eyed. I am not a hypocrite, Mrs. Wynstay," Thelma said composedly. "I never loved him, and after I learned that I was cheated into marrying a man who had tuberculosis—a fatal heritage—in his blood, I turned utterly against him. Could I help it? My horror of passing on the disease was the trouble, or I might have grown to be fond of him. One has to think of Eugenics."

"Used he to drink when you were with him?"

"No. He must have taken to it afterwards."

"Poor fellow! He was not strong enough to stand up against his great disappointment. Mrs. Oathwait, if he did wrong in deceiving you he has paid for it heavily. I could not have done what you did—left him to go down!"

"Mrs. Wynstay—I considered I was absolved from my marriage vows; besides, what right have you to judge me?" Thelma Oathwait flushed angrily. "Gareth understands, and holds me blameless."

A wave of fierce jealousy swept through Elizabeth Wynstay at the stranger's mention of Gareth with the hint that she had his sympathies.

"Am I to understand that you knew my husband while he was on holiday in England?" she said through pale lips.

"In *Scotland,* to be accurate," Thelma retorted, insolently. "But what is that to you?"

—"And allowed me to believe that it was for the first time, when you arrived, yesterday?" Mousie was furious. She wanted to strike the hateful face.

"I don't know what your husband let you believe, but I am sure *I* made no statements. Your husband and I had a very good time in the Highlands. If

there is anything you want to know, I do not mind obliging you. He has been and is still my devoted lover. But you have no case against us as you were not at that time his wife." Her triumph was insulting.

"What I want to know, I prefer to get from Gareth himself. I think I quite understand the position. Of course, you will arrange something, for you cannot remain under my roof after this? There are many hotels in Calcutta."

"That, of course! I should imagine that you will be too proud to hold Gareth now, if he can manage to satisfy the law in order to get a divorce. We have settled that already. My name need never appear, however, for it will be easy for him to compromise himself, if he knows how to go about it, and makes no defence. The thing is being done every day, why not by us? Collusion, of course, but nobody need know." She moved towards her room and concluded over her shoulder with a look of contempt in her lovely eyes—"I shall be packing, so if you will kindly send a tray with luncheon to my room, I need not be compelled to meet you at table. That will save us both needless embarrassment."

To say that Mousie was inarticulate with shock and despair, would be saying little. For the rest of the day she was confined to her bed with sickness and nervous prostration, and when Gareth returned, it was to find her in a darkened room, a prey to utter desolation.

The two memsahibs had quarrelled, he was told by a servant who handed Gareth a letter from Thelma Oathwait written before she had taken the train for Calcutta. The *darzi* who was engaged to mend the household linen was occupied with his duties in the verandah when he heard angry voices and looking round the door, saw that the lady of the house was being insulted by the guest, whose face showed great wrath and contempt.

Gareth read the letter, his mind in a tumult.

"Dearest," (it ran),

"Mrs. Wynstay and I have had plain speaking. "It seems she knows something about us, so I saw "no sense in leaving her ignorant any longer. After "all, what we want more than anything, at this "moment, is your freedom, darling, and that you "can arrange to bring about as soon as possible. "I shall understand, quite, and take none of "the allegations seriously. It is a God-send that "my name need not now appear at all. It makes it "so safe for our future, for no one ever holds it "against a man that he has been divorced by his wife "for misconduct. They generally blame the woman "for being such a fool as not to have been able to "hold him. Life is so unfair to my sex. If Bob "had lived to divorce me, I should have been made "to suffer for the rest of my life in one way or "another by our social pharisees. My address for "the present will be The Great Oriental Hotel. "Please write and keep me informed, and come to "see me, week-ends. I shall not be able to exist "without you, I know. I shall look forward with "the keenest joy to the day when you and I shall be "again together, all-in-all to each other. Doesn't it "quicken your heart only to think of it? Oh, those "days in the mountains! I was mad to leave you, "and I knew it, immediately; but, then, you dropped "out of ken and I could not get news of you again. "Darling, darling!—come to me soon,

"Your own LYNETTE."

Gareth made his way to Mousie, feeling very much like a cad. He was going to tell her the whole truth and leave her, which seemed a wanton thing to do. He had never really loved his wife in the right way! He had loved Mrs. Oathwait when ignorant of her name and identity. What had been an adventure in the Highlands, had taken a hold of his heart and life, and there was no other woman in the world for him now but "Lynette," as he had fancifully called her. That being the case, it was unfair to her, now

that she was free, and to Mousie, since he had never loved her, to keep up the pretence of being happily married, when his whole soul cried out for his true mate.

Mousie would have to be told all this, and Gareth wished that he did not find it so difficult. He was fond of her and the thought of bruising her faithful heart for his own selfish ends, made him feel wretched. He recalled that day in her lodgings when he had sworn that the other woman (Lynette) had gone for ever out of his life. Had he not been able to say that, Mousie would never have married him. He thought of her many tolerances and self-sacrifices, her consideration, and steadfastness, and felt that he should be kicked and hounded for his failure to "play the game."

Mousie had never for a moment imagined that Gareth would ask to be divorced. The worst she expected to happen, was the retirement from the scenes of Mrs. Oathwait and long years of uphill efforts to win Gareth to care most for herself in the end. He had not sinned towards her, so was not guilty in the eyes of the law. His affair with Mrs. Oathwait belonged to a period before his marriage to herself, so she had no sort of case against him. What had happened, was a clear case of bewitchment.

When he, therefore, stood before her with downcast eyes and suggested a trick by which the law would be satisfied to grant her a divorce, she was stricken dumb.

"But the dishonour!—Oh, Garry!" broke from her while she strove in her pride to keep her self-control. "I never knew that a woman of no principles could so demoralise a good man as to make him act dishonourably!"

"I hate it as much as you do, Mousie," said he, humbly. "But there is no other way."

"I might think out something," she said clasping

and unclasping her hands to still their trembling. "I have more respect for a sinner who openly steals what he has no right to possess and stands to bear the consequences, than one who degrades himself by cheating to win. Why not elope with Thelma Oathwait and let me do the obvious thing?"

"Because it will involve her in publicity and disgrace. I have to think of her."

"Oh, Gareth! How blind you are!—and that is the woman you love and are trampling on me to possess? She is too great a coward to accept punishment for sin, but does not mind *your* being the scapegoat? You will see that it will be the same in all things. You will be the scapegoat, as you are now. In any case she makes you lose your high place in the world's respect!"

"Don't say such things, Mousie. But I can understand your point of view. However, Lyn—Thelma," he corrected himself since Mousie would not understand the fancy-name, "is no coward. She is thinking of her child—the boy that you told me about. She loves him dearly and is trying to save her good name, for his sake."

"I think you will find that she has an eye to the main chance, too. Why should she drag her name through the mire if *you* can arrive at the required result without her having to suffer? She doesn't care how much mud sticks to *you*."

"You don't understand her! However, she has gone and we won't re-open this subject till we see our way to something. At present, I am greatly upset at Bob's death. One thing I will say, and that is, that I am terribly ashamed of the way I am treating you, Mousie. You deserve everything of the best and have got the worst!"

That was all. He left her alone to grieve for hours and lie staring at the ceilingcloth, wondering how to give him his freedom without injuring his standing in the world. It did not seem to matter what became

of her, for she had married him knowing that he was not in love with her, but suffering with a great passion for someone else. He had married her only out of kindness, and now that she was in the way, she wanted more than anything to get out of it and let him go free. Life would look very different when Gareth was no longer hers, but he wanted his freedom and must get it, whatever the cost to herself.

Mousie seemed to lose her fine judgment in her agony of mind. Her sense of proportion was lost. Accustomed to making Gareth her first thought, her God, her mind was bent only upon rescuing him from his difficult and unwelcome position. He must not be allowed to sink to dishonour and spoil his fine record in order to be rid of his wife. It was for her to prove her love by making the greatest sacrifice of her life for him. She who had cared so well for him, must help him now, even at her own expense.

After hours of wild quixotic inspirations, she dashed off a letter to Peter Riley, after which it was despatched by hand, and Mousie was crushed with humiliation. She had explained nothing, only called him to her. What would he think? When he came, he would know all she wanted to tell him.

It troubled Mousie to think how intensely Gareth must dislike meeting her at meals now that the truth was laid bare. The awkwardness of the situation was dreadful—for him. The mother-feeling uppermost, made her heart bleed to think of how miserable it was for him to be tied to her now his beloved had returned to him, free, and she wanted to save him every possible pang. For her, there was no awkwardness for she loved him too unselfishly to keep him if it was his wish to leave her for Thelma.

That night, while Gareth was smoking alone in his den, a slim kimona-ed figure appeared in the doorway, and Mousie stole to his side. At first he was afraid there was going to be a scene; Mousie pleading for a reconsideration of his intentions, wanting him to

remember how kind and good she had been—how ready to serve him to the end of her days. But he was rendered voiceless when he understood what it was she had come to say.

"Garry," she spoke in a voice that sounded completely under her control, "I don't want you to worry about me. I'll manage all right. What I want is your happiness, old thing. Let us remember, above all things, that we are real pals. Let nothing interfere with that. So, as a pal, I am going to see that you get what your heart is set upon. You must not try to trump up evidence for a divorce and so lose caste in the eyes of all who have honoured you—there is another way I am thinking out for you, that will save a great deal of bother. I shall be able to explain when I see my way clearly. But, take it from me, my dear boy, that everything will be O.K. You are not to be troubling your head for ways and means to be freed. It is going to be as easy as laughing, and nobody that matters, the worse. That's all. I only came in to say good-night and to tell you that you—that you need not worry at all about me."

"What do you mean, Mousie?" Gareth asked anxiously. "Look here, my dear, what are you thinking of doing?" He tried to read her eyes in the shadows and failed, as she kept her back to the light, trusting to the sound of her voice to convince him of her indifference. What was she trying to convey to him?—that she was going to commit another tragedy? Good God! "Mousie! what are you contemplating? Are you mad?—it has been bad enough about Bob, to-day, for God's sake——"

"Oh, no, no, no! How could you *think* it, Gareth? I am not out of my mind. There never was anyone saner. I am not going to take my own life—not I! Perhaps, I am too great a coward to try that way out!—besides, one never knows, if one lives long enough, how useful one might be in the

world. I have great plans and am looking forward to the good time that is coming for me, some day," and she laughed uncertainly.

"You deserve the very best, Mousie," said Gareth, emotionally. He was robbed of all eloquence and could only stare at his wife in wonderment. To-night she had risen to great heights in his respect and admiration for her wonderful qualities. Truly, there was no one in the world like Mousie! He was conscious of a lump in his throat which would not be swallowed, and a queer pain deep in his heart which he did not understand. If there had never been that episode of the Highlands——!

"Good-night, and thank you, Gareth. I'll tell you as soon as I can, what I have planned." Mousie slipped from the room as noiselessly as she had entered it, and Gareth covered his eyes with his hands deeply ashamed and touched. What*ever* did she mean? What other way was there of getting his freedom, but divorce—his or hers? *His* was out of the question with a saint like Mousie. What *did* she mean?

The following day, while Gareth was at Talbegan attending the burial of his friend and meeting the executors of the will, Mousie received a visit from Peter Riley.

While Mousie was setting her house in order, he entered unannounced, something feline in his tread, and a look of eagerness in his alert eyes.

She caught her breath at sight of him, for it was one thing to summon fate and another thing to feel committed to a fateful act. She hated the look in Peter's eyes as they rested curiously on her, for she had turned him out of her house the day before. He would, naturally, triumph at being recalled, and she felt humiliated.

Peter leant against the framework of the door and watched her tearing up correspondence. She had flung him a salutation over her shoulder but did not

stop to make conventional conversation. There were things she had to tell him, and it went terribly against the grain to do so.

"You are very busy. Are you going away?" he asked coolly.

"It seems like it, doesn't it? You are right. I have made up my mind to go away as soon as I can fix things up with you."

"Me?" Peter straightened himself and entered. A chair beside the little writing-desk being unoccupied, he took it the better to study her face.

It was very pale with dark shadows under the eyes. Mousie had never looked plainer or been more desirable to him than at that moment when he sensed his advantage out of the calamity which threatened her.

"I suppose," he went on, "you have discovered for yourself that things are not as they should be between your husband and Mrs. Oathwait?"

"Have you heard that Mr. Oathwait is dead?"

Peter was startled, and a few minutes passed while Mousie acquainted him with facts. She then went on to make bald statements. Gareth had been in love with Mrs. Oathwait believing her a widow at home, and, as his feelings were unchanged, something would have to be done. She had considered that something, and would tell Peter exactly what she intended to do.

"You mean to give him up?"

"Yes."

"Divorce him?"

"No. I cannot. I have no case. He must divorce me."

Peter stared at her for a moment as though he thought she was taking leave of her senses, then he burst out laughing.

"What case has he?"

"I have got to give him cause," said Mousie, her eyes lowered though she carried her head proudly. "My husband is going to Calcutta for the week-end.

I thought—I thought it a good opportunity for me to get away from here. I have got to go—and *with someone.*"

"You wish seriously, to—*elope?*"

"Yes."

"And after that?"

"The deluge. I suppose I can find my way home and—and work for my living."

"Good God!" For a while Peter Riley could find nothing to say, being robbed of eloquence, because dumfounded.

"Can you offer no suggestion?" she asked, scribbling diagrams on paper.

"I can offer you my protection for life," said he, gravely.

"Your wife will divorce you?"

"She'll be only too glad."

"But I wouldn't marry you, Peter Riley. Not for untold gold."

"And I would go on my knees for the right to keep you honourably as my wife till death did us part."

"So you say!" contemptuously.

"Look here, Elizabeth," said Peter Riley, leaning closer and speaking earnestly, "chuck all that, and, for once, give me credit. I have never respected or cared for a woman in my life as I care for you. If you are going to leave Gareth Wynstay and he will divorce you, will you let me take care of you always? It is marriage I am offering you, when I am free."

"Peter, my dear man, to begin with, I don't believe in divorce and I don't believe in re-marriage, under the circumstances. I am not a Catholic, but I have my opinions. I shall be Gareth's wife till I die, no matter what he does, or what the world thinks and calls me."

"I am to be made a convenience of?" he asked angrily.

"You need not. I can go to Calcutta—there are always opportunities——"

"God! What are you thinking of? You are coming with me. Do you hear? With *me!* and we'll talk of the future later on. Heavens! to think that you are doing this to free him!"

"When you understand my plan thoroughly, you will not look so tragic. You will probably be very angry. But we will have to talk it out. If you are my true friend you will help me, not thinking of yourself but of my need, alone. You will have to understand the sort of woman I am, and then—perhaps you will like me a great deal and love me less. I have not any use for the love of a man who is not Gareth. I am suggesting a business proposition with no money in it, only profit for one. Shall we discuss ways and means?"

For sometime they talked earnestly, Peter growing excited and rebellious, Mousie calming him with quiet reasoning. "The only trouble is that you will be divorced!" she concluded. But Peter did not care and said so vehemently. "Then it is settled. I shall be an outcast, but it won't worry me. When I leave the country I shall find a profession—such as nursing—which will keep me busy and save my mind from thinking too much of my grief and loss. I have thought it out and my losing my good name will not matter so much as Gareth spoiling his career, for no one will approve."

Riley held out both his hands which were far from steady, and she put hers into them. "And he will profit by your sacrifice—the *cur?*" emotionally.

"He won't know the truth."

"You are a little fool, but, by God! a stunner!"

They then discussed ways and means till it was time for Peter Riley to leave when an interruption came from without. Mr. DeMello wanted to see Mrs. Wynstay.

"Again?" Mousie looked distressed. "He is

greatly worried on account of his wife because of *your* mischief. Oh, why didn't you leave her alone!" She sent her salaams to the caller, which gave him the liberty to enter, and DeMello came in, pale and agitated, then started at the sight of Peter Riley.

"Oh, you scoundrel!" broke from him regardless of the fact that the "scoundrel" was a bigger man. "It is your doing! Where is my wife?"

Tableau!

Mousie started to her feet; Peter Riley rose with a frown and a look of surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and Mousie simultaneously exclaimed:

"What has happened?"

"Madam, that man has enticed her away!" pointing dramatically at Riley.

"It is not true," said Peter. "He can call me a scoundrel as often as he likes—I'll not resent it, for it is probably deserved, but I am not going to submit to false accusations. I know nothing about your wife, Mr. DeMello."

"She had a letter from you this morning—will you deny it?"

"No. I *did* write to her——"

"Well! when I returned from the *kacharis*, she was gone! No one can tell me anything. All I know is that she has *gone!* I have searched the entire station. But *you* will probably throw light on her disappearance, Mr. Riley." He glared ferociously at his enemy.

"Do you want to know what I wrote to her?" said Riley, having the grace to look ashamed, "I told her that I was dropping out of a friendship that was leading us farther than I had intended it should go. There have been no criminal relations between us, Mr. DeMello. But I would not have answered for myself if things had gone on, as of late. I don't pretend to be moral or a purist, and your wife is very young and unsophisticated. I don't deny that I have

been damned idle and mischievious to have taken her about—but, that was all there was in it, and——"

"You made love to her!" cried DeMello fiercely.

"I have made love to every woman who has not discouraged me, Mr. DeMello, and love only one who has sternly repelled me and kept me in my place. That is God's truth, Elizabeth," he turned to Mousie. "You will have to look elsewhere, sir, for your wife. I know nothing of her movements, and think the police will help you best of all."

DeMello looked as if he could kill the big lazy fellow before him. His eyes measured the length of his frame, the muscular limbs, the sensual, pleasure-loving face which had proved so attractive to his wife, and decided that to stay was to waste valuable time. "I hope nothing serious has happened, Mrs. Wynstay, but, by God, if there has, I'll—I'll not be answerable for any act of revenge I might be tempted to commit." With that, he fled from the house.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUBSTANCE FOR THE SHADOW

After the events related in the last chapter, a strange hush descended upon Gungaserai. The days passed to the close of the week without anything to mark them, while Gareth and Mousie met with the usual friendliness, she setting the lead like the "Mousie" of old before Fate, in a malicious mood, had linked her life irrevocably with his.

He spent his working hours at the *kacharis*, and she in the house going methodically through inventories of all that Gareth possessed, and putting everything in perfect order so that there should be no confusion when she had gone. There was a great deal of mending to do which a *darzi*, seated on a mat in the verandah, undertook for his daily wage; and all her own belongings to separate and pack away safely. At the end of the week, unknown to Gareth, two trunks containing things of personal value to herself were despatched to Calcutta to be left at the parcels office of the railway station, till called for. There was nothing she forgot or left undone.

When Gareth said he was spending the week-end in Calcutta, Mousie made no comment. She knew it was to be with Thelma Oathwait, and rather enjoyed heaping coals of fire by superintending the packing of his suitcase, for Gareth was notoriously incapable of doing things for himself and, manlike, would leave everything to his bearer who in his

bachelor days, invariably omitted the most important articles of his toilet.

To have left the responsibility with his servant, would have been to cause Gareth moments of agitation and ill-temper at the other end, and herself a great deal of mental worry, over his deprivations and discomforts. So capable and devoted had been her ministrations and forethought, that his servant had lost the habit of caring for his master's needs. Sometimes, it was a melancholy satisfaction to Mousie to feel that it would be long ere Gareth would learn to do without her, for Mrs. Oathwait would expect him to serve her.

Women like Thelma, out of their own selfishness, make their men extraordinarily unselfish; while unselfish wives unwittingly rob their husbands of opportunities to develop the most sympathetic of human traits.

Mousie thought over Gareth's illicit passion till her brain ached, for it seemed to her that he was under an evil spell. He could not forget that holiday in Scotland and was living for the chance of restoring the poetry of it. But could things ever be the same for him again? She saw the broken threads of that romantic passion, jagged and ugly, defying all efforts to piece them together again, because of the lies and deceit that had been used in the making, and the task seemed hopeless.

One thing she believed certain: The poetry of a great romance built upon the idealisation of an object, must perish when that object is discovered to be unworthy. The glamour surrounding Gareth's passion for Thelma could no longer exist now that her true character was exposed.

Gareth would not have made love to his friend's wife, however beautiful and alluring she was; but believing Thelma a widow and free to make what she would of her life, he had fallen to her allure.

Therefore, knowing him as Mousie did, she could

not help feeling that it was his natural fidelity that was holding him to the woman rather than real love when he had no longer a respect for her character. The end was inevitable. Passion without respect for the object was like a furnace deprived of the right sort of fuel; it was predoomed to extinction. When that happened, with all her beauty, Thelma would be ugly in his sight and he would love her no more, for he would realise that his honour had perished in the effort to keep the flame alight. He would then remember his little pal-wife and curse the day he had forced her to give him up.

In shame-faced fashion, Gareth asked her before leaving for Calcutta, what plans she had in mind, for he wanted to get on with the business. A divorce took such a "devil of a time" going through, that nobody lived long enough to stand such delays; and he saw nothing for it, but to give her cause to divorce him.

Mousie quite understood his burning impatience to claim Thelma, and was humanly malicious when she pointed out the need to do things in all decency. Bob had only been dead a few days!

The decree *nisi* took six months, he reminded her. Couldn't she give him a definite idea of how she proposed divorcing him without making him appear an unfaithful brute?—her own idea! Personally he did not care a hoot, but she was so keen on saving his face for him!

"By the time you come back, I shall have everything quite ready," she said, offering him her hand in farewell. "Perhaps, you won't mind kissing me—we have been good friends, haven't we, Gareth?"

Gareth acted on a sudden impulse and took her in his arms with affectionate warmth. "You have been an angel to me, Mousie. I said I did not deserve the gift of such a wife. I repeat it. I am not worth the love and kindness you have showered on me. Forgive me——" his voice broke. "I feel I am such

a brute to you, but if you only understand how it is——"

"I do—I do," said Mousie. "And you see, I am not jealous, because you cannot help it, and it is I who am in the way. She was first."

"Good-bye," said he, looking very much embarrassed as he kissed her forehead and lastly, her lips. "Try not to hate me for this."

Mousie waved her hand and he was gone.

Her own tragedy had blotted out from mind the fact that Mrs. DeMello was still missing. Gareth had learned from the police inspector that no trace of her had been found in the station. It was believed by the police staff that she had gone after Peter Riley to Madhupara, where those who knew about it were probably bribed heavily to keep the fact a secret. Otherwise, he had placed her somewhere else, for which reason a watch was being kept on the planter who would, presently, give himself away by secretly visiting her.

Mousie refused to accept either theory for her disappearance. Elvira DeMello was quite capable of acting childishly in her rage and humiliation. She had, probably, vented her spite on her husband for his jealousy by letting him think she had eloped; whereas, she was in Calcutta with her people, enjoying the fuss and stir at Gungaserai, which it did not require much imagination to visualise. Mousie was so sure of such an explanation, that she refused to trouble herself with anxieties and speculations while completing her arrangements for her own flight.

Gareth, meanwhile, enjoyed his week-end leave in town with his Lynette who surprised him by appearing in deep mourning.

"One has to conform to public opinion," said she, by way of explanation. "It isn't hypocrisy, but convention, which I hate, but have to respect. That is the worst of living in a city. One cannot please

oneself like in far away rural places—Craigmanan," she finished archly.

Gareth found her intensely seductive and as full of allure as ever, and he was her slave—with one difference: he saw her as she was, a beautiful and unscrupulous woman whose lust for sensation and adventure had drawn him into her toils in Scotland. When most under the spell of her beauty and enchantment, he could not help doubting her statements and, inwardly, questioning her honesty.

Her own indifference to the truth, sowed seeds of suspicions in Gareth that spoilt some of his happiest moments with her.

Yet, her charm was unique, and Gareth was incapable of exercising an independent judgment while with her. What she wished, he never opposed. She was his law. So that, when she led the way to a restoration of the old relations and secretly gave him the freedom of her suite, Gareth saw no sense in considering his wife from whom he was already parted. Mousie had given him up, and Thelma was an enchantress, so the week-end passed in his trying to recapture the essence of a vanished dream.

He watched her move among new friends and old at the club of which her husband and she were still registered members. He was dead, and her deep mourning obtained for her insincere condolences from those who had always known that the Oathwaits had not "got on." But what amazed him and held him dumb, was the fluency with which Lynette could lie! "The truth was not in her." She was a past mistress at lying, and he now understood how easy it had been to her in Scotland to invent her widowhood and reasons for refusing to become his wife.

The greatest shock of all came when she, so sure of his abject slavery and her power to hold him, told him that she had no little child in England. Her baby had died in early infancy on the way home,

and was buried at sea, but she had never told Bob, as it had not been expedient to do so.

"You see, darling," she said, while lying in his arms, her cheek pressed to his, "he was making me an allowance for the child and that would have been cut if I had told him. You know how difficult it is to live at home on a paltry five hundred a year! It would have been three hundred without Baby's extra, so I would not tell him as the child was not his, anyway, and he knew it. After all, what did it matter? It was not as though he was fond of it! It was mine and the loss was mine."

"But—Lynette——" Gareth tried to collect his wits. "Only the other day, you told me that the child was the main factor in your refusal to live openly with me and get a divorce from Bob. You had to think of his future and your standing as his mother ——"

"You silly old dear! That was before I had any idea that Bob was going to die. I was afraid of the disgrace and publicity. People are so stiff and beastly about divorcées. Now that he is dead and we can marry, it is time you should know that you will not have any encumbrances."

Gareth had no answer ready, so smiled to gain time. His ideas were in confusion, his brain chaotic. He would have to puzzle it all out when freed from thraldom. While her soft arms were about his neck and her exquisite form lay pressed to his heart, he was bereft of the power to reason. He was enslaved, and yet—there was something missing. A spiritual something that had once made his passion for her almost divine in its completeness. There was nothing divine now in their relations, for he had ceased to regard Lynette as honourable. She was lovely; she was beguiling; but not trustworthy. In fact, she was revealing herself a beautiful devil! He was discovering that his feeling for her was more physical than mental; proved by his thrilling to her touch

while his mind condemned her as a born wanton. She was perfect as a man's mistress—but how would she wear as his wife? were questions he asked himself in the train on his homeward journey in the midst of grave misgivings, recalling Mousie and the miracle of wifehood she demonstrated.

Mousie had been too good to him and he began to wonder if it was possible that a man could love two women at the same time with equal depth and sincerity. Impossible, surely, for no one would appeal more than Lynette to the human side of him, and the bias would be too great. On the other hand, Mousie always appealed to the best in him, and her influence must endure longest, and in time, so absorb him as to leave no room for another love. He could almost believe in the two different loves, for it was a strange fact that he was hurrying back to Mousie at Gungaserai, fresh from Lynette's arms, feeling the need of her restful companionship. He was like a miner ascending to the sweet air above the sulphurous atmosphere of the shaft, and longing to fill his lungs once more with its purity.

So Bob must have felt when rid of his infatuation for Thelma; for rather than submit to seeing her and being reminded of all he had suffered at her hands, he had killed himself. In spite of his wife's great beauty, he had had no desire left towards her; that was evidenced in the end.

Gareth thought very hard and long on that railway journey and could not account for the feeling of unrest that kept him from being happy though he knew the way would soon be cleared, and he be able to own his love for Lynette before the world. How was it that he had none of the old, blind craving for her, the mad obsession which would have made it impossible for him to leave her in Calcutta and return to his work at Gungaserai? By now, he should have been miserable and downhearted, filled with jealousy of the men she would be seeing in his absence, and

unable to concentrate his mind on duty. He was still very much in love and full of admiration for her beauty, but there was no doubt of it that respect had vanished and with it the old atmosphere that had made their union ideal.

He hurried from the railway station to the bungalow with a feeling of shame and contrition in his mind towards Mousie. How miserably he was treating her! How magnificently she had taken his failure as a husband! In spite of his abominable behaviour, she would greet him with smiles and he would find his home the acme of comfort and himself surrounded by her loving care. It was unbearable. It made him feel such a cur! Just as well they were parting, for he was not worthy to be her husband.

What was the idea brewing in her brain which was to free him without the need to mar his career, and yet which would not mean death to her? She had promised to tell him on his return.

It was not decent—it was horrible to treat Mousie like this!

Gareth quickened his pace unconsciously, hardly knowing why, but he wanted to see if Mousie was taking it hardly? He felt such a bully—such a brute. It was like shooting a faithful dog. He was a dog-lover and could never shoot a dog even to put it out of pain. He thought of many parallels, and each made him writhe in self-disgust.

Why was he doing this thing?—only for self-gratification and lust?

He was beginning to think that his feeling for Lynette was largely composed of baser human instincts which some women knew well how to evoke in men, and inspiration told him that he would recoil from her before many months were gone.

The substance and the shadow!

He wondered—and quickened his pace. The short distance between the station and the house seemed extraordinarily long that morning so that in his im-

patience, he almost ran up the steps of the verandah of his bungalow, two ideas in his mind, a drink and Mousie. It was thirsty weather and an iced drink had its appeal. Mousie had healing in her eyes,—those honest eyes that had never lied to him! He wanted to know that she had forgiven him and would not suffer too much for his sake.

But Mousie was not visible. For the first time in the months of their married life, she was not watching for his coming.

A well-dressed bearer wearing a turban a foot high, *salaamed* and presented him with a note. There was a strange look in the man's eyes and a grimness about his lips that hinted at something grave having happened.

Mousie's handwriting.

Gareth wondered why—? people don't write to each other in the same house!

Or had she gone anywhere for a day?

Where could she go? As yet they had not met anyone in the district save Riley, who could entertain her, and she would not go to Madhupará alone! She was too careful of her reputation for that.

It did not take long to think so far and to open the envelope.

The servant had discreetly withdrawn so that no one witnessed the change that came over Gareth's face.

> "I told you" (the letter ran) "that I would ex-
> "plain my plans when you returned. By the time
> "you read this, you will have all the evidence you
> "need to divorce me. I am leaving you for Peter
> "Riley and as we are never likely to see each other
> "again, let me wish you good-bye and good luck.
> "ELIZABETH."

Gareth stared and stared at the paper in his hand. Read and re-read its contents, then burst out laughing. He laughed till the tears stood in his eyes;

wiped them away and laughed again, then, without warning, buried his face in his hands and wept.

"Little fool!" said he to the note. "Oh, you priceless little fool, to think that you could take me in, one single moment with a yarn like that! As if I don't know the stuff you are made of! You couldn't do it. You'd die rather than do it! Oh, Mousie, you little idiot. But what a glorious kid!"

The thing was to find out where she was in hiding. He would send for Peter and make a clean breast of what had happened and ask his help for a solution to the puzzle of her whereabouts. As if he would allow her to sacrifice her good name for him!

Gareth shook himself and called for his bearer. The man arrived in a moment with a tray of whisky and soda, and Gareth asked him if he knew where his mistress had gone. He felt the humiliation of having to put the question, but he had to know.

"The boxes were labelled Calcutta, *huzur*. She left by train with Riley Sahib."

Then it was true! What the hell?—Gareth could not stand still. How could she have done it?—and with such a rotter as Riley? He paced the floor like a wild beast in a cage.

"When did she go?"—(Gad! what a scandal for the district!)

"She went on the morning after *huzur* left."

This was Monday! To think that she had been in Calcutta all the while he was with Lynette! And with Peter Riley. Damn the fellow! he'd as soon wring his neck as look at him. Mousie with *him!*

But what right had he to object to her choice of a partner or anything she did after the manner in which he had behaved? The amazing part of it was that she had done this thing for no other reason than to set him free!

Gareth was trembling with excitement and emotion, for it was his doing that Mousie was to-day a degraded woman. Little Mousie, loyal and true with the

highest sense of honour and love of purity that any woman in the world possessed.

In a moment, Gareth's whole outlook had changed and he knew that he had made the greatest mistake of his life by thinking for a moment that he could be happy at Mousie's expense. His very soul rebelled against taking advantage of her sacrificial act, and the more he thought of her with Riley, the greater was his hatred of himself and all that had led to her making it.

If he had only known of her intention in time to frustrate it! But he had been living in a hypnotised state with Thelma Oathwait whose influence over him had been wholly evil. Thelma! whom he had called Lynette and adored in the Highlands as his ideal of womanhood, but who was incapable of honour and, in her attitude towards sex, very little better than her sisters of the Underworld!

It was the substance for the shadow, indeed!

Gareth was beside himself with remorse and shock. What had he done! There was no one better suited to him than his wife and he had not appreciated the fact till he had lost her. The libertine, Peter Riley had her now.

Gareth took a fortnight's leave as it was impossible for him to put his mind to his official duties, and he returned to Calcutta in the hope of tracing Mousie's whereabouts and offering to take her back; but a letter from the Head Clerk at Madhupara in reply to one from himself, informed him that the planter had gone away on a three-months holiday.

It was then that he gave up hope. The mischief had gone past retrieving, and he felt that he would have to make the best of things and "carry on."

He appeared before Thelma one day after alarming her by his long silence, and confessed all that had nearly turned him crazy. Naturally, he received little

sympathy, for Mousie's act fitted in with the widow's programme, perfectly.

"Surely, darling, you are not worrying?" awoke in him a feeling of angry impatience. If that was the way she looked at it, their points of view were very wide apart.

"Don't you see that it makes me a downright cad?" he asked coldly.

"I don't see why it should," said Thelma with wide blue eyes of astonishment. "You had no use for her, loving me, and I think it very decent of her to provide for herself in that way. It relieves you, anyway, of the need to make her some sort of allowance."

Gareth left the room abruptly. Thereafter, in the weeks that passed, he often found himself regarding his "Lynette" with eyes from which a veil seemed to have fallen. Though she used all her arts to restore the fire of his passion, something had snapped within him, so that he could only act the part which had once been spontaneous and sincere. He wondered if she did not sense the change in him. If she did, she was more than ever the enchantress for his sake, little realising that the critical faculty once aroused in a lover meant death to love.

"Have you filed your petition, Gareth?" Thelma asked him one day when he was spending a week-end at the hotel, and lounging in her private suite.

"I thought," said he, "that you were a great advocate of free love?"

"I am—but I thought I told you, before, that one has to consider the world. People are beginning to look askance at me on your account, you know. What about it? Besides, people here will, vulgarly speaking, 'smell a rat.'"

"People be damned!"

"Indeed? The sooner the divorce is granted the sooner you and I will marry, or we won't get the chance. Those ridiculous six months make me

anxious. Thank heavens that the King's Proctor is not omnipotent! But he might ferret out these visits to my rooms."

"I don't feel that I have any right to divorce Mousie now. These visits make such an act the meanest form of hypocrisy and cheating." To save him dishonour, Mousie had ruined her own good name for ever! The irony of it! Instead of regarding her conduct as a terrible sin, he was thinking of her as a heroine and wondering if such a sacrifice as she had made did not count to her for merit. By committing adultery in this case, she was more virtuous than the most rigid of purists. Though he was not God to differentiate in such matters, to his human reasoning, Mousie's great sacrifice had purged her act of all sinfulness. If he could find her, he would go down on his knees for forgiveness, for he was, by far, the greater sinner.

"Gareth!" Thelma sounded anxious. "Are you backing out? I did not think you capable of that."

"Oh, no," said Gareth. "I am willing to go through with it. I was only thinking how well we did in Scotland without the legal tie. If you remember, it was your own gospel. But I shall file the petition presently, if you wish it."

"I do," said she, firmly, a hard look in her lovely eyes. "You must not forget that circumstances alter cases."

Gareth smoked his cigarette in silence, a harder look giving a grimness to his jaw.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ELOPEMENT

MOUSIE shivered inwardly with nervous distrust when Peter Riley assumed the care of her on the train journey to town. There was a look in his eyes she had never before seen and could only liken to cunning because he now had her at his mercy. He was not too ready to meet her eyes, but he showed her he had forgotten nothing that meant her comfort and ease. When the express rushed into the platform at the junction, she was glad to find it crowded for she hated nothing so much as the thought of being alone with him on the long journey to town; but he hurried her into a compartment in the rear of the train which had been reserved for them through a wire he had despatched to headquarters. Mousie made no fuss, as there was no time to think of protesting, and was whirled away in a capacious carriage with Peter disposing of handbags and packages so as to give them space as well as order. He seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly.

"I knew you would be feeling wretched," said he, "so thought you would like to get away from crowds. Now, if you are wise, you will let me make a bed for you and you'll try to sleep."

"I could not sleep at this hour," said she, gazing out of the window at the flat and uninteresting landscape.

"Let me give you a drink of coffee from the thermos? It will buck you up."

"No, thank you. Please don't worry about me, Mr. Riley, I am quite comfortable."

"But not happy," said he, taking his seat beside her. "Do you know, you have done something that no woman in a thousand would have done? Deliberately given your husband, whom you worship, to another woman—standing to lose all down the line! What did you do it for?"

"I thought I had explained it all!" (Wearily.)

"You did, but I have not been able to grasp the idea. How anyone can deliberately stand to be a loser just to make others happy, is beyond my psychology."

"I am doing it only for Gareth who is all the world to me."

"You should have held on to Gareth, then, and not have been so weak as to give him his head."

"If I had not done so, he would have taken it."

"And if you had not divorced him, he could never have been free to marry that woman."

"For which he would have hated me with all his heart. I prefer that he should think kindly of me, for I love him. If you love anyone better than yourself, you are equal to any sacrifice."

"I am afraid I am not. For instance, I love you very much, though you don't appreciate it, and would spend my life trying to give you a good time. I am not equal to the sacrifice you demand of me, that is effacement, when we have spent a day and a night under the same roof together in platonic harmony. You have a very Arcadian plan by which we are to share a suite at a hotel and keep separate rooms. The world may think what it likes, but you wish me to play the fraternal stunt? Do you know any man who would accept the position and be the fool you wish?"

"You would hardly be a fool but a chivalrous gentleman, because I am trusting you. You pro-

mised to do all I wished when we discussed this plan. Do you wish me to think you are a cheat?"

"I have done what you wished, Elizabeth. I have brought you away—eloped with you and given Gareth a case as far as it appears. So far, it has been satisfactory to you. But where do I come in? You are mine according to appearances. No one on God's earth would credit you with being innocent. My wife would win her divorce if she asked for it. But what's for me?"

Mousie forced herself to meet his yearning eyes.

"There is nothing for *me,* Peter Riley. I am beggared. My state is infinitely worse than yours. I want a friend more than anything, and you could be that friend."

"I guess I am—and your lover too. I don't know why I am so daft about you—you little slip of a thing! —I say to myself, 'She isn't even beautiful. What about it?' and it is inexplicable!—you don't like that, do you?—I'm rude?"

"No. I prefer frankness and truth. I have no use for flattery."

"I am frank because I can afford to be to one who is independent of beauty. You are beautiful in all that matters and you are the sweetest woman I know. I prefer to see your face than one classically perfect in its outlines. I have been wanting to steal you from your husband from the first, but I was afraid of offending you by a word of love-making. I can't offend you now, Betty, for you have stepped off your pedestal and are technically mine. You belong to me and by rights should be in my arms, letting me love you—why I don't, I can't understand, unless it is because you still love your worthless husband and would be bored by my kisses. Let me love you, Betty?—let me teach you to forget all the pain and distress of the past few days." He put out his arms and she shrank further back.

"Listen, Peter," said she, and was interrupted immediately——

"That's right. I have longed to hear you say that."

"I call you by your name because it is absurd to be formal now when we have to talk so intimately. Listen. If you tried to make love to me I should hate you and fear you. On the other hand, be good to me because I am so utterly in your power, and I shall feel that at least I can count on you—look to you—lean on you and be grateful."

"Give yourself to me, Betty," he said, leaning to her and speaking ardently. "You will never regret it. What have you now to lose? See—I am offering you sanctuary. We will marry some day, oh, my dear, my dear! Why turn away? Isn't it foolish? We are going to live together for a few days. It will be the same as if you have been living in my arms, my own, my girl? why jink at the post?"

"I will try to explain—If I did as you wish, I should *feel* lowered and depraved, for I am Gareth's wife. Nothing can alter that. Peter—I am not an adulteress."

"You will be called one in open court."

"But God will know, and *you* will know that I am not that! and the knowledge of my innocence will enable me to keep my head high, otherwise I shall be without respect. Self-respect is a wonderful stimulant, Peter."

"You are old-fashioned, Betty. Hidebound by conscience and convention. You must acknowledge that the Mosaic law has been proved unsuitable to our times. Every go-ahead nation is becoming more sympathetic to the needs of human nature. Men and women are leading the way to greater honesty and more rational living. Why should human beings with such a power to love and such a sense of discrimination, be restricted by senseless hard-and-fast laws from arriving at a happiness which is after their

own hearts. We don't live long enough for the sacrifices demanded of us."

"And we don't live at all but perish eternally if we trample on others to grasp at the happiness our human instincts demand. Life would be a case of the survival of the fittest if people did only what was lawful in their own eyes. I have a husband, Peter, who does not want me. You have a wife who would be glad to give you up. But I don't love you, Peter, and even if I did, you have children who should look to you for an example of honour and right living."

"We would have a thin time if we always had to make virtuous examples of ourselves for our children."

"It is a stern responsibility; otherwise, we are to blame if anything we do causes them to 'stumble,' as we are told. The truest form of happiness is being at peace with one's conscience."

"But if you haven't one? Mine atrophied long ago."

"Then don't interfere with anyone else's. Give them a chance of living up to their lights. Don't think I am a prig and narrow-minded. We are what we have been brought up to, and I could no more live in sin and get away with it, than fly to the moon. It would be the death of me."

"You think so. But wait, Betty, till you have suffered for this act of yours and you will be glad that I am at the back of you, ready and willing to take you the minute you make the sign. Well—anon! You and I are to live together and only ourselves the wiser regarding our relations each to the other!"

"I am thinking of you from now onward, as a brother," said Mousie, and Peter grimaced.

"I wouldn't bank much on that," said he. "It mightn't work. I am rather a devil when the fit takes me, and—I am already thinking it won't work, Betty. I give you fair warning."

But Mousie smiled as she was sure she was beginning to influence Peter in the right direction.

The journey was tedious, Mousie sleeping a great part of the way, while Peter smoked innumerable cigarettes and read the English papers, and both were glad when it came to an end and they were turned out on the Howrah platform.

"Where are we going?" Mousie asked him when a taxi was piled with their luggage and Peter handed her in.

"I have arranged with McKinnon for the loan of his flat while he is away. He knows a lady is with me, so everything will be comfortable and servants ready to serve. McKinnon is a decent sort. I am sorry you won't have the chance of meeting him."

"I should have hated meeting him, in these circumstances!" said Mousie.

"But you will have to get over that, now you have made the plunge, for no one is going to imagine that the lady who is staying with me at McKinnon's, isn't *my 'special.'* It sounds coarse," said he, as she winced, "but let's face things. How else do you suppose that Gareth is going to get his divorce?"

"Still, need I meet people?"

"You needn't. But it will be more cheerful if you do."

"Where is this flat?"

"Right out of town—a sort of suburb with a train service."

Mousie tried to take an interest in Peter's conversation, feeling all the while that he was going to be a problem, for her. It was clear that he was determined not to give up hope of getting her. Time would break down her resistence; meanwhile, he fully intended to keep her with him. Where else did she expect to go? But Mousie was already thinking of the jewels Gareth had given her, the ring at Christmas, particularly, and wondering how much she could

realise on them so that she could sail for England at the first opportunity.

The flat was in a pretty suburb that flaunted gold-mohur trees and the scarlet poinsettia in abundance, and there were houses and mansions let in flats standing on their own grounds and almost buried in trees.

Mousie's cheek burned as she entered a mansion and was carried by lift to a delightful flat overlooking a football ground where Indian school boys were engaged with the game. When she was shown to her room she had a shock to find that the servants had evidently imagined Peter was to share it with her, for twin beds were made side by side, and the suggestion was more than she could bear, so that Peter had to order its removal.

She suffered terribly while dressing and undressing, for there were no bolts to the doors and loose *pardars* swayed uncomfortably in the gentle evening breeze. She did not feel that she could trust Peter to respect her wishes, because of his undisciplined nature and the circumstances that gave him rights she could not deny. However, she was undisturbed while she dressed for dinner, for which she uttered secret thanksgivings. She dressed for dinner feeling more inclined for bed, and found that she had no appetite for the meal. Peter remarked on her pallor and insisted upon her taking wine. He was kind and attentive all the evening and refused to go to his club as he infinitely preferred taking care of her. When it was bedtime, beyond looking at her with eyes of deep reproach, he treated her with the respect he would have paid to a queen, and retired to a room farthest away.

Mousie did not know when she fell asleep, but it was almost immediately, for she was very tired. And she slept soundly till morning, but the instant she arose, she felt very ill indeed. Her head swam and she was terribly upset. Of course, she was sure it

was the aftermath of the strain she had suffered, and there was nothing for it but to stop in bed.

"I think I will have the doctor," said she, when Peter interviewed her from behind the hanging purdah. "I feel so ill I can hardly stand."

"Have you a temperature?" he asked, full of alarm.

"None at all, only a gastric attack. Please, Peter, don't mind me, but go out and enjoy yourself."

"Likely!" he scoffed. "Can I come in and see you? Surely you can let me judge what is the matter? I feel so worried."

"You needn't be."

"I feel so responsible for you——"

"It isn't cholera, Peter, and I'll be all right if I stay in bed."

"I dare say, but I must see you and satisfy myself that you want for nothing, then I'll telephone for the doctor."

There was no fighting him, for he was already in the room and beside the bed, full of real concern. "You look so white!—I wish I knew what was wrong. It would be ghastly if you got ill, Betty. I do so want to take you about!" said he.

"And I wouldn't go about to be seen by people, for worlds. It is quite enough what I wrote to Gareth without my having to show myself with you. When he files his petition and I make no defence, that's all there will be to it." Mousie tried to endure his presence and appear at ease, though her heart was fluttering with self-consciousness in the fact of being visited by Peter while she was in bed. It was their supposed relations that made it so awkward for her, and not any idea of indecency, for she held the sheet to her throat.

He asked her many questions concerning her health that made her colour with embarrassment, for she did not think he had any right to be so intimate. But some men are only too ready to take a liberty and need

very little encouragement to drop all reserve. She hated the type and felt like screaming in hysterics. What with her disturbed condition and his solicitude, she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"If you will go now and send a doctor, I shall be grateful," said she.

"I'll telephone. But let me stay and nurse you?" He looked in earnest, and full of sympathy, but Mousie was not in the mood to endure him, and dismissed him with determination.

She wondered he did not turn against her for her coldness and obstinacy; but he was very kind and sent her grapes and fruit, none of which she was able to eat; books, magazines and newspapers which she could not touch, and came constantly to her door for bulletins.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DIAGNOSIS

THE doctor called and as he was not willing to give an opinion immediately, Mousie was ordered to stay in bed for a day or two. When he had seen her for a few days, he would be in a better position to pronounce on the cause of her indisposition.

There was no doubt about it, that Mousie was feeling very poorly indeed, which showed in the dark shadows under her eyes and constant nausea. She was too unwell to persist in snubbing Peter's efforts to be of use, and in the end, found that he made a very good nurse since she was not ill enough to go to a nursing home. She began to feel intensely grateful, for he ceased to trouble her with demonstrations of feeling and confined himself entirely to easing her distress. In those few days, he might, actually, have been a brother, his care of her was so unromantic and natural.

"I am so very sorry to be all this trouble to you, Peter," she said apologetically after he had brought her flowers and a fresh lot of magazines.

"Don't speak of it! I love looking after you."

"I have been wondering so about you," said she. "You ought to have made a good husband. You have all the capabilities."

"I never had a fair chance. I could be a good husband to you, Betty."

"I am sure of it!"

This seemed to give him hope and he redoubled his

attentions. He even suggested that she should get rid of the *ayah* he had procured for her, and allow him to be sole nurse; but the notion met with a decided negative.

"I have discovered, Betty, that you are becoming prettier every day." His eyes regarded her pathetic face with great tenderness. It was round and child-like, with frightened eyes and a very youthful skin. Her slightly tip-tilted nose was sweetly pathetic, and her wide, shapely mouth—at the moment rather tremulous—was tenderly appealing.

"It is nice to think someone appreciates my ugliness," she said. She was beginning to understand Peter so much better for she had discovered that a great deal of good lay buried beneath the bad.

"I think I told you long ago that yours was a face that grew on one, because so lovable."

"You also told me that—Gareth"—she was beginning to find it so hard to speak of him—"would love me best in the end."

"Did I? Well, I seemed to have been out in my calculations. But he'll probably regret this to the end of his days. Anyhow, now that he has lost you, I'm going to make myself responsible for your future——"

But Mousie shook her head. "When I am better, I will tell you what I want to do and I know you'll help me without hesitation." She put her hand into his, and Peter took it to his lips. As yet, somehow, he had not ventured to kiss her, at which he was surprised. Under no other circumstances would he have been deterred, but Mousie was different from all other women, and his respect for her, held his impulses in check.

A few days later, Mousie was feeling better, though still subject to infrequent gastric attacks and feelings of faintness. The doctor was expected to call for the third time and state what he thought was the matter. In the meantime, Peter brought in her breakfast on

a tray, and sat at the bedside to assist in feeding her.

"Feeling better?" he asked, searching her face. "You look a ghost, but I expect you will be better now, every day."

"How comforting! I hope the doctor will suggest my getting up."

"I expect he will. I should like nothing better than to take you a trip to Australia to blow the cobwebs away."

"They are rather more substantial, Peter!" She smiled.

Peter was encouraged by that smile to re-open a subject she had hoped he had given up considering. "I want most of all to make you trust me and credit me with telling you the truth when I say that I love you truly, Betty. Not in the fashion that has made me a bit of a beast. It's because I have never had much faith in women—because I have never met a girl like you—that I have become what you see me. I married only for companionship, feeling that a lonely life was not good for anyone. She seemed a good sort and I admired her looks. I did not really think it was in me to care more than I cared for her—which was entirely a physical thing. Then, as you know, we drifted apart very soon. I went my way, and she went hers, taking the kiddies with her. I happen to know that she would be glad to divorce me, but she could not furnish proofs, for servants are loyal to a good master, as a rule. Out of malice, I refused to help her, knowing she would marry again, and I rather enjoyed preventing her. But now, all is changed. I shall be glad of my freedom. If you will let me love you and devote my life to you, I will promise under God, that there will never be another woman in my life."

"I believe you mean it, Peter," and she sighed because of his persistency.

"I have always been a careless devil, Betty, and a

dam' selfish one, but there is nothing I would not do for you. Nothing I would not give up."

"I—I might have to ask you to prove that, some day."

"I should be glad. You are the sort to give one faith in ideals and make it worth while trying to be something better than a hog."

They talked on for awhile, and then he spoke of Gareth.

"He is in town—on medical leave,—camouflaged, of course. I escaped a meeting by the merest chance. He did not see me for he was mooning along looking like a lost sheep. I wonder what he was doing about his lady fair?"

The description of Gareth brought the ready tears to Mousie's eyes. "Was he looking ill?" she asked, anxiously.

"I did not think he was looking too bad. I wouldn't worry about his health any more, if I were in your place. He doesn't deserve it. Of course, he knows you are with me, but he hasn't an idea of my address. I have not given it to anyone for the reason that my friends are out of town—and the others don't count. I, also, saw Mrs. Oathwait in a shop the last time I ran into town. She was looking as pretty as a picture, but her type doesn't appeal to me as she is too much like myself for me to worship her. Nothing would give me more pleasure than a chance to pay her out for the dirty game she has played on you."

"But she knew him first!" put in Mousie.

"When she was married to Bob and shouldn't have carried on with Gareth or any man, for that matter. She's a real—oh, well," feeling that he couldn't say the word in Mousie's presence, "that affair will not last, you will see!"

"I don't think it will," said Mousie with a sigh, "but it has lasted long enough to wreck my life."

"That is why I want to be even with her."

Mousie was terribly discouraged when the doctor

arrived, and looked gravely at her. What was he going to say? Had she some masked disease which would hinder her working for a living? In which case, she would pray for a speedy death.

"What is it, doctor? Why don't I get better?"

"Have you no suspicion of what is the matter with you?" said he.

"Frankly, no, for I have never given myself a thought."

"You are going to have a baby, Mrs. Riley," said he, breaking into a smile. It was not the first time he had called her Mrs. Riley and she had not corrected him, for Peter was responsible for the mistake.

Mousie's eyes opened wide as the truth dawned upon her, something seemed to give way in her head and she fainted outright.

When she recovered consciousness the doctor was telling Peter that she was doing very well, but would have to be kept very quiet. "It seems strange," said he, who was of the old school, "how many pregnant women in these times dislike the prospect of childbearing. It is a pity, for the world is not any the better for that determined shirking of the maternal duty. Unless there is something wrong, every woman is better in health and morals for childbearing."

Mousie was feeling too dazed for argument, nor would she have said anything had she been able. The doctor was not expected to know her feelings on the subject of bearing Gareth's child when she and her husband were parted for ever, and her character ruined. The thought running in her mind was that she was now faced with the direst calamity of all. Gradually, the realisation of what had happened pressed on her with a feeling of panic. What had she done! Oh, what had she done?

If it had only been known a little earlier, she could never have given Gareth up—*never!* For his child's sake, it would have been his duty to turn his back

upon the temptress, and hers to have pointed it out. Gareth was not the man to have seized his own happiness at the cost of a grave responsibility. He would, in time, have learned to rejoice in the sacrifice, for what was so wonderful as fatherhood? They would have been so content, eventually, for their happiness would have been secured in the child. Now all was lost. It was too late—too late!

Mousie was weeping her heart out when Peter came to her and took her hand.

"Don't. It makes me feel so rotten to see you grieve. I knew all the time, almost from the first—at least, I guessed it," said he. "But I thought it would come better from the doctor than from me. Try to cheer up. I'll do all I can to make you happy."

"Oh, Peter, Peter! what have I done!" she moaned.

"It does seem a mix up, from your point of view. But *I* don't mind; and, for your sake, will stand by the kid when it is born."

"But—can't you see, Peter! People will never believe it is his! It will make it appear that——" the thought was unspeakable. Besides, she had no intention of living, *ever,* with Peter!

"It is no worse than what they will be thinking in any case."

"Think of the injustice to the child! He will not know that Gareth is his father——"

"We'll tell him if you like—or her."

But Mousie shook her head. "How can you convince a child when he is grown up, that his mother was innocent when divorced? and that he might have been the legitimate son of his father, but for a mad act of quixotism on the part of his mother? For *ever* he will be falsely stigmatised as a bastard, when he was by rights the offspring of a wedded pair whom the law had parted unfairly!"

"It is worse than a problem in euclid! But why

worry? It is past praying for now. You must just make the best of it."

"Peter, try to understand! Had I known this earlier, I would have *died* rather than done this thing. It would have been my bounden duty, whether Gareth liked it or not, to have remained his lawful wife for the child's sake. If he had left me for her, I should not have divorced him; for he would, one day, have realised his duty to his own flesh and blood, and come back to me. The child comes before all personal feelings and desires. There are so many things to be considered; the moral welfare of the child, its position in life. What a crime I have unwittingly committed on my own child! Gareth himself would, I am sure, have sacrificed everything had he known. No decent parent will forsake a child and rob it of its lawful inheritance for the sake of personal desire and *lust*." Mousie was wrought up to a great state of excitement, and Peter was alarmed. "Think of a child of mine growing up as illegitimate—a thing of shame, when he is nothing of the kind! Now you know what is breaking my heart, for I have burnt my boats. What *shall* I do!"

"Make up your mind, dear, to be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, and accept the inevitable. To me it is all sentiment. By the time your kid has grown up, the divorce laws will be revised and more humane. We will be having divorce for incompatibility of temper and various other frivolous reasons, as in the States, so that he will be perfectly happy and not give his position a thought. As my son, he will not know he hasn't my blood in his veins, and the world having a short memory, not owe anything against him. You too might, by that time, feel that you rather like me. That is my hope."

"Oh, Peter!" Mousie could say no more. It was useless to try to make him see her point of view.

Peter blinked hard and swallowed. "What is your idea, Betty?"

"I am beaten, Peter. All I want to do is to go

home and live somewhere, quietly, till it is over, then work for a living for myself and the child. But I have no money!—there are only the jewels I have treasured as Gareth's gifts to me. That diamond ring at Christmas!—and my mother's trinkets. They must go. Please take them to town and sell them for the most you can get."

"Then it is all off? You want me to get out? Dear—it is a mistake! You cannot fight the world, alone, and for a child!"

"There is an old saying—'It's a poor hen that can't scratch for one chicken!' I can take in needlework, or keep boarders."

"Let me make you an allowance, Betty! I shall be wretched thinking of you struggling——"

"No, oh, no! I couldn't with any self-respect let you give me money."

"Then let me lend it!"

"I shall never be able to repay it. It would weigh me to the earth, for you have been good enough to me—I cannot increase the debt!"

"Poor Betty!—you are the same girl I admire and will always admire. This all comes of spoiling that husband of yours to the hilt—being too ready to give him the moon. Sometimes it is best for us devils to be denied. But you could never deny Gareth! Now give me the jewels."

Mousie directed him where to find them, and Peter took them away.

The next day, he brought her a sum that far exceeded her wildest dreams of the value of her jewels, and she gasped. Seeing her look, Peter, who could not meet her eye, assured her that the diamonds were of remarkable quality—that even the jeweller was surprised. Mousie was deeply grateful to him and thanked him again and again. Peter had to look away from the pathetic joy in her eyes, and hide the twist of sympathy and emotion at the corner of his mouth.

"Will you take my passage for me to-morrow?" she asked him. "I shall be eternally grateful, Peter."

They discussed the relative merits of the different liners, Mousie exercising self-control for his sake, for he had been very good to her and she had already wept till she was tearless. She had, indeed, burned her boats, and now there was nothing she could ever do to convince people that she was not the worst of women. She would bring Gareth's child into the world under a cruel ban, and her punishment for her madness would be greater than she could bear. Not only was the letter she had written Gareth proof of her downfall, but the fact that she had been living alone with Peter for days in a flat, just out of town, spoke volumes in evidence against her.

Even the doctor who had attended her, could vouch that they had passed as husband and wife—it was finished!

. . . . . .

(Long afterwards, Mousie received a packet with Peter Riley's love, and it contained the jewels she thought he had sold for her. It was like seeing old friends again, and she wept from gratitude—but this has nothing to do with the story.)

CHAPTER XXVI

BETTER FISH

It was just about a fortnight after this, that Peter Riley saw Mousie aboard a liner bound for London, and took his passage in another boat for Australia. Entire change of scene was what he needed and wanted.

While waiting for his boat, he picked up a newspaper, one morning, to find in it a small paragraph announcing the fact that the body of the missing young wife, Elvira DeMello, whose husband was Mr. Alexander DeMello, Deputy Magistrate at Gungaserai, had been found washed ashore on a sandbank several miles lower down the river. At the coroner's inquest, the verdict was "suicide while of unsound mind."

So the mystery of her disappearance was solved!

It was horrible to think that he was as much responsible for her death as if he had plunged a knife into her heart! Peter was unnerved and shaken. He could not help recalling various scenes he had provoked by his mischievous and meaningless attentions —how greatly it had amused him to see her drink in his flattery with childlike belief in his sincerity; and how slavish had become her passion for him. He had never wanted her to love him, but had not been able to resist the excitement of playing with fire. When he saw that she was in fierce earnest and ready to leave her husband for a word from him, he had thought it about time to retire, and told her bluntly that their meetings would have to stop; that he had

reconsidered his position and hers, and was sorry if anything he had said or done, would cause her to suffer.

It was so easy for him to retire, for he had only been amusing himself. It seemed, however, that what had been fun for him was death for her.

Peter retired to the hotel saloon and ordered himself a double whisky which he drank neat. He felt morally convicted of manslaughter, and it was not a pleasant thought. In all the mischief he had done in his careless life, such a ghastly thing had never before happened, and it turned him sick. It was clear that he had driven that weak-minded girl insane with passion. For the first time in her unsophisticated existence she had been made love to by an Englishman and his kisses had awakened hopes and longings that were doomed to disappointment. In the end, she had not had the grit to despise him for his treachery, but had in her unbalanced condition, drowned herself! But for his interference, she would have been quite content to live her uneventful life and make Alexander DeMello a good and faithful wife!

Peter felt that he had acted despicably. In future he would confine his mischief to flirtations with married women or widows who were fair game.

This made him think of Mrs. Oathwait towards whom he bore an undying grudge for the ruin she had wrought in Elizabeth Wynstay's life. In Peter's soul, Elizabeth Wynstay was for ever canonised, and for her sake, he was ready to fight the world. If he could only devise a plan by which he could, in some way, retaliate on Thelma Oathwait for what she had done, he would be happy. Why not? He and Mrs. Oathwait were on a par—both unhampered by conscience—diamond cut diamond. He conceived it worth while to introduce himself to her and see how far a woman of the world like herself was susceptible to an onslaught, such as he planned, on her vanity. He was glad she did not know him by sight. He had

only three weeks left in which to achieve his object, so must lose no time.

The first thing to be done was to find out if Gareth had returned to Gungaserai.

This was not difficult. He learned at the hotel that Gareth had left for his sub-division some time ago, and was not expected back for the present. As yet he had filed no petition for a divorce, which seemed strange, for surely he wanted to hurry it through? No matter, for it suited Peter Riley's plans better, for the present, that he should not be drawn into the limelight of publicity. Fortunately for his little game, his friend who owned the flat was not expected in town for a month, and other acquaintances were so slightly known that there would be no difficulty in avoiding them. Calcutta was very full of visitors and the season was at its height, so that people he knew would be too full of social engagements to interfere with his programme. The fact that it was daring and risky, only added to his enjoyment and gave zest to the fun.

When he called on Thelma one afternoon, he sent up a card filched from those on a tray at the flat, as being the most likely to assist him.

And Thelma read:

"Sir Arthur Wentworth, Bart."

The name was familiar. She frowned—Sir Arthur Wentworth? and then remembered that she had seen his name in the paper not long ago as that of the millionaire oil king visiting India. In a moment, she was in a flutter of excitement, wondering what had brought him to call? She did not know that he had left India by the Bombay mail the week previous, and ran to a glass to tidy her hair and powder her nose ere he should be shown to the private sitting-room of her suite. Why had he thought of visiting her?

She received Peter with great cordiality and puzzled eyes, looking very beautiful and young.

"I took the liberty to call as I am an old friend of

your late husband, Mrs. Oathwait," said he, courteously, taking the seat she offered him. "I have long wished to have the pleasure of meeting you, and it was with great distress and sympathy that I learned of your sad bereavement."

Thelma immediately looked pensive. "It was so sudden!"

"I read of it in the paper and was reminded of my own case. I too lost my wife last year under the same startling conditions, only—we were separated and her death was not altogether regrettable." (It was a delicate way of letting Thelma know that he was a widower, therefore free to wed.)

She smiled sympathetically and murmured that their cases were very parallel. "I have not been happy in my married life, but it is not a matter I could discuss. I am so very pleased to see you. How long are you staying in the East, Sir Arthur?"

"I have not yet decided. It depends—for instance," lowering his voice and fixing keen eyes of admiration on her face, "I would just as soon stop on for a bit if—you are staying in Calcutta."

"I am, though it is rather lonely for me. I have been nowhere as people would wonder to see me about so soon after my husband's death, and I could not publish the fact of our incompatibility to the world. Mine has been a sad life, Sir Arthur."

"That's all wrong. You should have had the happiest of lives for I could imagine the joy it would give a fellow to lay the world, so to speak, at your feet." All the time he was speaking, Peter knew the value of looks and tones, and took the fullest advantage of his experience with women to make his irresistible. "I wish you would allow me to use the privilege of an old friend,—if not yours, your husband's,—to take you to a show to-night. Dine somewhere first, and then drop in at the theatre. I have two seats in the stalls."

"I—I don't think I should!" she replied, longing

to accept but afraid that by doing so she would lose the sympathy of her new acquaintances, being in deep mourning. Yet, it was hard to deny one in Sir Arthur's position, and he seemed very eager and admiring!

"I don't think you need trouble about people. Do say yes. I don't want you to look on me as a stranger. Positively, I feel as if I have known you a very long time."

Thelma consented, and Peter had to remind himself not to go too fast. It was so easy, with Thelma Oathwait, to flatter and flirt. Whether she believed him or not, she showed that she frankly enjoyed it, and was, in her turn, both charming and encouraging.

When Peter retired, he felt that he had progressed quite far enough for a beginning.

At the theatre he mentioned having heard of a fellow named Wynstay, who had been a sort of neighbour to Bob Oathwait. "I believe his wife ran away the other day with a planter—what's his name?"

"Peter Riley. A man with a very bad reputation. I believe his wife left him because she could not stand his ways," said Thelma.

"A bad look out for the woman he has eloped with."

"That, of course. He is bound to desert her."

"I suppose Wynstay is divorcing her?"

"Oh, yes—only, he prefers to wait a bit, I can't understand why. I thought, by now, he would have started proceedings, but he has put it off till he returns." Thelma looked cross and discontented. Then remembering her position, smiled radiantly and shrugged her shoulders. "It is of course no business of mine!"

"I should like to meet this Wynstay. He seems a rather fine fellow, from all accounts."

"You will meet him if you are still in Calcutta by the time he returns."

"I know I shall be furiously jealous of him!" his eyes seeming to devour her beauty.

Thelma coloured and flirted her eyelashes. "*You* need not be jealous of any man."

"Look here," said Peter leaning closer so that his arm rested against her snowy shoulder. "Will you come out with me when he is here?"

"Why not?" she looked self-conscious, then lifted her eyes shyly to his. "You must not think that because we are friends, that he means anything to me."

"Thank God for that! I don't know," he whispered, "what you have done to me, but I am going to become a great nuisance, I am afraid."

Thelma coloured and was visibly gratified. "You couldn't be that, however much you tried."

Matters had progressed so fast by the time they were driving back to the hotel in the hired car, that Thelma had to check his encroachments. With his knowledge of her character, gained from Bob Oathwait in his cups, Peter was certain that no man would be repulsed if he showed an anxiety to make love to her—least of all, one whom the world recognised as rolling in riches, so his passionate expressions of admiration were a trifle premature and overdone. He was, in her eyes, a "great catch" and in order to land him, she had to go wary and play him for a bit, so she coquetted and ended the evening by asking him to lunch with her the following day.

"And after that?" said Peter.

"I suppose you will go home."

"Not a bit of it. I have heaps of leisure and can't think of spending it apart from you. You will have me on your hands. What are you going to do with me?" His eyes burning into hers, caused them to droop. "Come for an afternoon on the river. I can get a motor launch."

She agreed, and could scarcely sleep for thinking of the possibilities of this new friendship. He was

a Baronet, and rich! After all, she might never love again as she had loved Gareth, but no woman had the right to lose such a wonderful chance of advancement and wealth!

She was therefore very encouraging, and used all her fascination on "Sir Arthur," winning him to enlarge on the beauties of Wentworth Manor, photographs of which had been published in the last issue of "Country Life." How amazing to think that her beauty had captivated this hardened man of the world and made him as wax in her hands. But there was little that beautiful women could not achieve with ambition and wit! But how young he was!—she did not know he was so young—hardly forty!

Peter, aware that he was a downright scoundrel, enjoyed himself as never before. He styled his adventure as a brain wave, and made ready to catch his boat for Australia. He had met many women like Thelma Oathwait before—ladies born and bred, yet wantons at heart. Even her beauty gave him no new thrill for he had gone past the adoration period for lovely faces and tricks of attraction. Nevertheless, the game amused and entertained him, and he worked hard to bring it to the anticipated conclusion.

In order to impress him further and make him incapable of existing without her, Thelma was gracious enough at the end of the first week to submit to his demonstrations of love. Peter found that he could hold her in his arms in the darkness of the car, returning after an evening out, and kiss and caress her ravishingly. Thelma's experience of life had led her to believe that one way of bringing a man to the point of proposing marriage, was to lead him just far enough to make him desire complete possession. But Peter was a past master in affairs of the kind, so that it was not long before she was dining at his borrowed flat with plenty of champagne to exhilarate her naturally sensuous nature and befog her worldly judgment.

When she was preparing to return to her hotel early the next morning, she thought that surely her lover would suggest marriage. If he thought of returning to England presently with her as his wife, it was time she began to prepare a trousseau. She was anxious since her weakness and folly of the night before.

"Arthur!" she sighed self-consciously. "We have been rather mad, haven't we?"

"Yes, darling. You are worth going mad over!" said he, rapturously.

"It will be lovely when we need never have to part—like this," for she could hear the sound of the engines of the car throbbing under the porch. She came to him and wrapped her arms about his neck. "You are my ideal of manhood. How I love you!—my *husband!*"

"Will you be ready to come away with me at the end of next week?" said he, not able to meet her eyes.

"Do you wish it?"

"More than anything in life."

"It will be a rush to get ready," said she flushing, for what could he mean but marriage! Special licences and registry offices were so convenient. "If I am to be '*Lady Wentworth,*'" she raised her head and straightened her carriage unconsciously, "I will need to be well-dressed on the voyage."

Peter winced. "That of course," said he. "You must let me assist you." As Thelma was not unwilling, Peter gave her a generous sum to start upon, and drove her to the hotel.

Thelma told herself all the way that he might have put his proposal into plain words, but some men were so queer—they took things so for granted!—Of course, he meant to marry her, and would come to her any day with the ring and take her off to a registrar's.

On the strength of that, she wrote to Gareth after a few days, proud of being able to show her independence of him.

"Don't come this week-end as you promised, as I "have decided to end everything between us. Since "our love is no longer the wonderful thing it was, "it will be a travesty to continue loving relations. "I have made up my mind to marry Sir Arthur "Wentworth, and shall probably be leaving India "for good at the end of next week. Good-bye, and "think kindly always of

"Yours sympathetically,

"LYNETTE."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TRUTH

To Gareth, now alone at Gungaserai, the desolation of the place was insupportable. It was as though a death had occurred in his house. It was worse—for the death of a beautiful soul had taken place and all through his mad folly. Mousie was the sport of devils—his happy, loyal Mousie whom he had not appreciated till she was gone.

How he had tried to make himself believe that his love for Thelma—he had no desire to call her Lynette—was unchanged, till he could no longer blind himself to her character. Then—he could not explain it even to himself—her beauty had altered before his eyes, and what he had thought so lovely was, all at once, worthless. Thelma had no soul. Having given all she had in her gift she had nothing more with which to hold him. Whereas, in the case of Mousie, there had always been a new thought, an act of unselfishness, some gleam of goodness that had sweetened the days and made her as necessary to her husband's life as the very breath he breathed.

He missed her at every turn, when he rose in the morning and found he had nothing to wear that was without a lack of some sort—buttons off, holes appearing, stains not removed, and he was constantly obliged to apply to his bearer for relief, who pitied him with looks that enraged him and took full advantage of the mistress's absence to rob him and neglect his house.

He saw no visitors, had no distraction but what the dogs gave him. When he tried a round of golf alone, the very greens looked neglected and unsatisfactory and he could not keep his mind on the game. DeMello had gone on leave and would not be sent back to Gungaserai. The native acting for him was likely to be permanent. It was enough to make him ill to wander about the house and garden when not at the *kacharis,* and miss Mousie at every turn. It did him good to rate the *malis* for idleness, and dismiss servants right and left for failure to keep up to the mark. But it seemed that even the servants were missing her. The dogs, too, for they did not seem to understand what had happened and whined about the rooms. For consolation, the more affectionate among them, slept in her pet chair. It was pathetic.

Life was becoming intolerable at the end of a fortnight, when Thelma's letter came by the post, and Gareth read it twice over, wondering at the sudden sense of relief that it had brought. She was going to marry someone—rather quick work when she had not known the fellow two weeks ago! Still, it was just as well! Gareth had at last realised that a wife like Thelma Oathwait would never have brought him happiness. She would have wanted society and entertainment—it would have been the old discontent over again. Love was already on the wane with her, and in his case, it had died, so that there would have been nothing to save the situation. It would have been sheer disaster.

Who was she going to marry?

He looked again at the letter and frowned. Sir Arthur Wentworth? Surely she was making a mistake? To be sure! He sat down at once and replied.

"Dear Thelma,

"I think your decision is wise. I have discovered
"that you can no more keep disillusioned love alive
"than you can imprison a sunbeam. Henceforth, I

"am alone as no one shall take Elizabeth's place in
"my life and home. I should like to congratulate
"you on your approaching marriage, but surely you
"have made a mistake? Sir Arthur Wentworth is a
"married man. He and his wife entertained me at
"Wentworth Manor when I was at home on furlough.
"He recently toured in India with his wife, but has
"returned home.

"Your well-wisher,
"G. WYNSTAY."

Gareth posted his letter wondering how Thelma could have made such an extraordinary mistake, unless Lady Wentworth was dead—(people died suddenly)—and if her husband was too much in love with Thelma he would not wait the conventional period of mourning.

That same day, letters arrived from his friends all in the same vein. They had heard a rumour—could it, possibly, be true that his wife had left him? Someone said that she had gone away with a planter? They were all terribly sorry for Gareth and offered condolences.

As he had made up his mind not to divorce Mousie but to find out where she was and ask her to come back to him—for they had both made unhappy mistakes, and he had no right to judge her—his replies contradicted the rumours, and his friends were informed that his wife had gone home for a while. It was too common for wives to leave their husbands and go home for awhile; so he was satisfied that his explanation would be accepted.

All in a moment, in the way such things happen, Gareth was transferred to Calcutta to act for someone in the Secretariat, and given ten days joining time. He waived the joining time as he wanted to work so as to keep his mind employed, and was glad to shake the dust of Gungaserai off his feet. Thus, he called one day on Thelma soon after his arrival, to say goodbye, and wish her luck, and was shown up to her

private suite in the usual way, only to walk into a room where she was entertaining Peter Riley at afternoon tea.

Both men started and rose facing each other, but before they could speak, Thelma said conventionally, with a wave of her hand towards Peter:

"Hullo, Gareth!—you meet your friend, Sir Arthur Wentworth. I was going to write to you but saw your transfer in the Gazette and thought you would call—fancy your making such a mistake——" Whatever the mistake was, she was arrested by Gareth's expression.

"Sir Arthur Wentworth?—You scoundrel!" The presence of a lady obliged him to maintain his self-control, or he would have flown at Peter's throat.

"Wait a minute," said Peter. "I may be a scoundrel. But what do you call yourself for having driven your wife from her home—penniless, and an outcast?"

"Never! I would never have allowed it!"

"You made her do it." They glared into each other's eyes. "And if you think that I took advantage of her distraught condition, I will kill you where you stand, if I hang for it. She is as pure as an angel though it is no credit to me that she isn't now under my protection. I would have cared for her for the rest of my life, only she had no use for me but to throw dust in your damned eyes."

"What do you mean, in God's name?" cried Gareth.

Thelma, meanwhile, looked in alarm and mystification from one to the other. What *did* it mean?

"Your wife has gone home, I saw her off, and by God! I take off my hat to her. You are a blind idiot, man!"

Explanations followed.

"She—*told* me to divorce her!—Riley—the name of her boat? Quick!—I'll cable."

Riley named the boat. "If you catch the Bombay

mail, you might get her as she arrives at Tilbury. I'd give my soul to see her face when she finds you there!"

"Gareth!" cried Thelma almost suffocating. "*Who* is this man?"

"*Peter Riley* with whom my wife eloped, but you heard what he said? Excuse me, I cannot lose a minute. I must apply for leave on urgent private affairs." With that he dashed from the room, leaving Peter and Thelma to settle their difficulty as best they could.

"What is this dreadful thing you have done?" she asked him, looking as if she could sink through the floor.

"I have only cheated you as a reprisal for what you have done to the best woman on God's earth," said Peter Riley. "Call me names. I know I am a 'blackguard,' a 'scoundrel of the deepest dye,'—'no gentleman'—anything you like. I will bear up under the tirade."

But Thelma sank on a seat and burst into tears for her vanished dreams. The thought that she was not going to become Lady Wentworth and have great riches, was more than she could bear. Other things were of less account, for she did not view life from the standpoint of virtuous women.

"Oh, my God! how did you dare to do this!" She had lost Gareth, too, who would have kept his promise of marriage when freed. But he was going back to his wife—"Oh, my God!"

"Look here," said Peter relenting. "Come away with me if you think you can stand me, and when I am free, I'll marry you—I swear it, and we'll make the best of things."

Marry *Peter Riley?*—a mere planter!—living in a jungle? "Get out of this! I hate and despise you! You have humiliated me enough. I could put you in prison for doing what you have done!" she hissed in a frenzy.

"But you wouldn't dream of it! Too much publicity would not help you, dear lady, if you wish to marry well. I can't do more than offer to marry you, someday, but since you have refused, I will say good-bye." He picked up his hat and cane, and went from the room, rather glad to be out of the complicated business more easily than he had hoped.

A few days later he sailed for Australia, and Thelma had to console herself with the money he had given her for the trousseau. At any rate, it had given her some lovely frocks, all in colours, so that she would have to give up the idea of mourning. Thinking well over things, she decided to spend the season in Simla where, with any luck, she might make a brilliant marriage. It was early to despair.

The loss of Gareth whom she had loved as passionately as it was in her nature to love, was her heaviest blow. She would rather have kept Gareth at the risk of living in lonely places than marry some grizzled Colonel or retiring Member of Council, but her chances had all been exploded by, first, Elizabeth's wild act, and then Peter Riley's wicked one. Had he not conceived that dastardly trick, she would never have released Gareth from his promise. Horrible trick! He had never cared at all for her—and—oh! —it was unspeakable——

The only thing to be done was to forget speedily all about it just as though it had never happened. She could not punish the vile creature, so would try to imagine she had dreamt the whole, miserable business. She was glad now that she had never introduced Peter Riley to her friends as "Sir Arthur Wentworth"—and she could understand his object in refusing to be presented! His deception would have been exposed and his great reprisal nipped in the bud.

Thelma immediately set about forgetting the humiliating episode, and smiled upon admirers she had slighted, till her self-respect was restored by the

arrival of fresh adorers, who asked no questions since she was beautiful and a "thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Mercifully for her, Peter Riley had left for Australia and they would hardly be likely to meet again. When he returned, he would go back to his plantation, on which it seemed he had little to do, till some day his wife would hear of his many mis-doings and sever the bond that united them.

As for Gareth—he was a gentleman, and the world would never be the wiser, through him, concerning her past. She heard that he had been granted the leave he had sought, and was now on his way home.

. . . . . .

Mousie, having recovered from her temporary indisposition, made her voyage home second-class, a pathetic little woman with a look of great hopelessness in her eyes. Her fellow-passengers wondered concerning her, and some tried to be helpful, but she confided in none and lived reserved and aloof, asking for nothing, but was always ready to be kind.

It seemed a never-ending journey with days that dragged to a close. There was a great deal of fun all around her, deck games and tournaments, dancing and concerts, in all of which she was asked to join, but she shrank painfully from all idea of participating in idle pleasures when her whole life had been laid waste. Thus, at the end of the voyage, she had no part in the hearty farewells and arrangements to meet again as is usual among passengers who have grown intimate on a long voyage, but sat alone below thinking out how she should exist till her child was born. She thought of Phœbe Ray, but had not the courage to visit her in the apartment house at Hammersmith, and wondered if she could find respectable lodgings in Bloomsbury.

When the vessel glided slowly into the docks, she kept her cabin, waiting till the confusion of landing had lessened, when she meant to claim her baggage on the wharf and seek the cheapest route to town.

It does not need the pen of an artist to relate, therefore, her surprise when a noise at her cabin door made her look up to find Gareth's form in the opening and his eyes full of tears, gazing down at her. Nor is it necessary to describe what followed, except to say that it was a very different face that accompanied Gareth on shore to the boat train and thence to the old, familiar hotel at which they had stayed when first made man and wife.

"Darling," he told her when he had nothing more to say concerning his thankfulness at having recovered his precious wife, "the dogs have missed you terribly!"

"Oh, Gareth!—that sounds so 'homelike!'" cried Mousie.

"It is going to be 'home' as it has never before been for you and me," said he. "Will you ever forgive me?"

THE END

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